

## ENVIRONMENTAL HEALTH FACT SHEET

No. 203

### ***FOOD SAFETY - DOGGY BAGS***

Many restaurants offer customers 'doggy bags' for left over food. But there are potential health risks if it is not stored and handled properly after leaving the restaurant.

#### **THE LAW**

The *NT Food Act 2004* does not prevent restaurants from providing doggy bags. Restaurants may, however, elect not to provide this service. It is the responsibility of the consumer to store and handle food taken away from the restaurant safely to minimise the risk of food poisoning.

#### **THE RISKS OF DOGGY BAGS**

There is a risk of food poisoning if the food is not stored or handled correctly such as;

- Food kept unrefrigerated for too long.
- Food that has been kept for too long.
- Food that has not been suitably reheated.
- Food that has been touched with unwashed hands.
- Food that has been transported and/or stored incorrectly.

Temperature control is a key factor in limiting the growth of bacteria in food. Bacteria that commonly cause food poisoning grow very well between 5°C and 60°C - the "temperature danger zone". The Department of Health and Families advises consumers and food handlers to keep hot food at 60°C or higher and cold food at 5°C or lower.

'Doggy bags' are commonly taken away while in the temperature danger zone and eaten several hours or even days after the food was prepared. To reduce the risk of food poisoning it is important the doggy bag is refrigerated as soon as possible after leaving the restaurant to below 5°C, limiting the amount of time spent in the danger zone.

#### **MINIMISING THE RISKS**

##### ***FOOD BUSINESSES:***

- Have a set procedure for dealing with 'doggy bags'. This fact sheet can assist you in developing your controls and procedures.
- Advise the customer against giving the 'doggy bag' food to people who are sick or suffer with food allergies, the elderly or children under 5 years of age.
- Some foods may not be suitable for a 'doggy bag' e.g. If it has been outside temperature control for a given period (for service or display), or if it has already been reheated. In such instances, you must advise the customer accordingly.
- Document such information as date, time, food, customer's details and advice given. This will act as a useful record, should any queries regarding the 'doggy bag' later arise.
- Transfer food into new, unused food-grade containers.

Provide suitable labels or leaflet for all products leaving the premises, such as the example given below.

Business Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Food taken away from this premises needs to be responsibly handled to ensure product safety. In the interest of public health please ensure this food is consumed within 2 hours or alternatively:

- Refrigerate this food within 2 hours.
- Reheat the food to piping/steaming hot prior to consumption.
- Discard food if not consumed within 24 hours.

Please follow any specific advice given to you by the restaurant.

Date: \_\_\_\_\_ Time: \_\_\_\_\_

**CONSUMERS:**

- Follow the advice given by the restaurant.
- Refrigerate the food as soon as possible. Food left out of the fridge for longer than two hours may become unsafe due to bacterial growth and should be discarded.
- When reheating food, it should be heated until piping/steaming hot (above 75°C) all the way through.
- Food that is not eaten within 24 hours should be thrown away.
- Do not give the food to people who are sick or suffer with food allergies, the elderly or children under 5 years of age.
- As a general rule "if in doubt, throw it out!"

For more information contact your local Environmental Health Office.

Contact details can be found at

[http://www.health.nt.gov.au/Environmental\\_Health/Contact\\_us/index.aspx](http://www.health.nt.gov.au/Environmental_Health/Contact_us/index.aspx)

**FOOD SAFETY HOTLINE 1800 095 646**