

Background

Food is an excellent place for germs to grow – in the right conditions, the number of bacteria in food can double every 30 minutes. For these reasons food safety is an important part of infection control in early childhood education and care services.

Contaminated food can result in unpleasant experiences such as diarrhoea, vomiting, cramps, and fever. These experiences can be particularly serious for young children whose health systems are still developing, and in extreme cases can be fatal.

In Australia, early childhood education and care services are expected to implement practices which meet *Food Standards Australia New Zealand* and other relevant federal, state and territory and council regulations in the way food and drinks are prepared, stored, handled, and served.

Policy statement

This policy details how the Service ensures that its staff prepare, store, handle and serve food and drinks safely and hygienically, and in accordance with all relevant regulations and standards. The Service provides staff and parents with up-to-date information on safe food practices, and intentionally teaches children these practices.

Strategies and practices

Knowledge

- The Service aligns its food preparation, storage, and hygiene practices with the requirements of *Food Standards Australia New Zealand* and updates them and its policies and procedures annually and whenever new information is released.
- Educators are provided with professional development and training opportunities in food preparation, storage and hygiene practices which are also an agenda item at team meetings. All staff are expected to implement the Service's policies and procedures relating systematically and consistently to food.
- Services providing meals to children will employ a qualified Food Safety Supervisor and follow the recommendations in the Food Safety Program. Other service educators will undertake food handling instruction through, 'I'm Alert Safe Food Handling'.
- Educators are considered role models and, when eating with the children, are expected to uphold good personal nutrition.
- The Service provides families with information about food safety at enrolment and through a variety of means such as the Parent Handbook, notice boards, newsletters, information nights, educator-parent meetings, and the website. When required, information is provided to families in their home languages.
- Educators intentionally teach children the importance of food safety and hygiene practices during both planned and spontaneous experiences.

Food Handling

- Before preparing, handling, and serving food, staff wash their hands in accordance with the procedures in the Handwashing Poster – NHMRC, and then put on disposable gloves if physically handling the food.
- Staff maintain a high level of personal hygiene e.g. hair tied back, blue Band-Aids on cuts before putting gloves on, no hand jewellery except wedding ring.
- To prevent cross-contamination, raw and cooked foods are kept apart, and separate utensils are used. When chopping boards are used to prepare food, staff follow the Chopping Board Colour Chart to select the appropriate board.
- Food is always served using tongs, with gloves only used when required to physically handle food. Where possible, food is served in individual plates or bowls.
- Leftovers are always discarded, never reheated. Food prepared at the Service is refrigerated in sealed containers as soon as it is made and thawed and/or reheated once only.
- Tables are washed with the approved cleaning product and water, and dried before and after being used for meals.
- Where food from home remains uneaten, the food will be disposed of appropriately.

Kitchen Practices

- The designated food preparation area in the kitchen is used for that purpose only and is cleaned before and after use. The rubbish bins are emptied after each meal and at the end of the day. The kitchen floor is swept when required and mopped daily.
- A recognised professional pest control treatment is carried out every three months in all food preparation areas.
- All plates, bowls, crockery, and any other food utensils used by children and in the preparation of food, are washed in the dishwasher.
- If the dishwasher is not in service, all plates, bowls, crockery, and any other food utensils used by children and in the preparation of food, are washed in water as hot as possible with detergent, rinsed in clean hot water and allowed to air dry. If drying is still required, a clean tea towel is used, and the tea towel replaced after use.
- Children's food utensils and crockery are stored in a container with easy access to ensure hygienic handling.
- Plastic plates, bowls and cups with deep scratches are replaced.

- All children who have a suspected or identified allergy will be catered for each day of their attendance. Special 'Diet Charts' will be displayed in the kitchen and allergy charts and emergency action plans will be attached to the food trolley.
- Hot food, once prepared, is kept in the oven or on the stove (above 60°C) until it is time to be served. The food is then left covered until it is sufficiently cool for children to eat. Educators check the food's temperature before giving it to the child by removing a small piece of food with a spoon and testing the temperature on the inside of the wrist, and then discarding the food tested. All food is served within two hours of being cooked.

Children and Eating

- Educators ensure that children wash hands using appropriate hand washing techniques before eating and drinking.
- Educators intentionally teach children to turn away from food when they cough or sneeze, and to follow up with washing hands.
- Children are required to sit down when eating.
- Children are discouraged from sharing food.
- Children are provided with their own drinking and eating utensils at mealtimes. Educators ensure that children do not use drinking or eating utensils which have been dropped on the floor or used by another child. They remind children that sharing during meals can spread germs that could make them or other children sick.
- Older children are encouraged to serve their own meals using tongs.
- Children are encouraged to wash their face and hands after eating.

Cooking experiences

- Educators check that each child and the other educators involved wash their hands before taking part in children's cooking experiences.
- Educators and children follow other food safety and hygiene practices including tying back long hair and covering prepared food until served.

Food storage

Shelf Items

- Staff inspect all food items when first brought into the Service to ensure they are all in good order and well within their use-by period.
- All items are labelled with the date of entry to the Service so that the first in, first out (FIFO) rule can be easily followed. Any food removed from its original packaging is stored in an air-tight container labelled with the contents, the use-by date, and the date of storage

- All items are stored on shelves that are well-ventilated, pest-free, and out of direct sunlight.
- Food areas, cupboards and appliances are cleaned thoroughly and regularly.

Refrigerator and Freezer Items

- The operating temperatures of the refrigerators and freezers are checked twice daily with a thermometer and the results recorded on the Equipment Temperature Control Log. Foods are stored at the correct temperature depending on the product. Cold foods need to be stored at less than 5 degrees (C) and frozen foods at minus 18 degrees (C). Food stored in the refrigerators and freezers are checked daily with a thermometer and the results recorded on the Stored Food Temperature Control Log.
- Refrigerators and freezers are cleaned regularly, and seals checked for signs of mould.
- An inventory of the freezer contents is maintained, and details kept in a separate notebook provided for the purpose.
- Appropriate storage containers and wraps are used e.g., freezer safe containers, moisture-proof wrap such as foil and freezer bags. When wraps are used, food is completely covered.
- Staff inspect all food items to be refrigerated when the items are first brought into the Service to ensure they are all in good order, well within their use-by period and at a safe temperature. All items are labelled with the date of entry to the Service so that the FIFO rule (first in, first out) can be easily followed. Any food removed from its original packaging is stored in an air-tight container labelled with the contents, the use-by date, and the date of storage.
- Raw and cooked foods are stored separately to avoid cross-contamination. Raw foods are stored on shelves below cooked foods so that juices do not drip and contaminate the cooked food.
- Foods are thawed overnight in the fridge or in the microwave, never on a bench top.
- The Service does not use a commercial supplier for children's meals.

Expressed Breast Milk/Formula Bottles

- Parents and educators complete the Milk Bottle Register – Formula or Expressed Breast Milk (EBM) on arrival. This provides a check; that the bottle has the child's name on it; whether the contents are formula or EBM; the date and time expressed or made; and educator and parent dated, timed and signed that these details are correct.
- Children's bottles containing EBM or formula are stored at the rear of the body of the refrigerator and not in the doors.
- Bottle contents are thawed and/or heated according to the Service's Expressed Breast Milk (EBM) and Formula – Storing and Heating Procedure.
- The temperature of the milk is tested before giving it to the child. Educators test the temperature by shaking the bottle and sprinkling a few drops onto the inside of the wrist. The temperature should match body temperature.

- The educator responsible for feeding a particular child checks that the name on the bottle being used is the name of the child to be fed.
- Any milk not consumed is discarded.
- Children are not allowed to walk around with bottles, and babies are never left unattended to feed with bottles 'propped-up' to them.
- The amount a child drinks is recorded in the child's individual Communication Book, and this record is made available to parents at the end of each day.
- Dummies or bottles are never shared.
- Bottles, teats, and teat covers are rinsed well in cold running water as soon as possible after the completion of the feed and left to air dry. It is recommended that parents wash these items thoroughly and sterilize at home.

Additional safe practices for babies

- To ensure that staff take every precaution in following health and safety procedures when storing and preparing babies' breast milk or formula.

Responsibilities of parents

- To correctly prepare and deliver bottles of EBM/formula for their child to the Service in accordance with safe food guidelines.
- To read the child's individual Communication Book at the end of each day.

Procedure and forms

- Chopping Board Colour Chart
- Expressed Breast Milk (EBM) and Formula – Storing and Heating Procedure
- Handwashing Poster – Adult
- Handwashing Poster – NHMRC
- Milk Bottle Register
- Equipment Temperature Control Log
- Stored Food Temperature Control Log
- I'm Alert Training

Links to other policies

- Educational Program Policy
- Enrolment and Orientation Policy
- Handwashing Policy
- Interactions with Children Policy
- Nutrition, Food and Beverages – Parent Provided Policy
- Nutrition, Food and Beverages – Service Provided Policy
- Medical Conditions Policy

Links Education and Care Services National Regulations 2011, National Quality Standard 2011

Regs	77	Health, hygiene and safe food practices
	78	Food and beverages
	79	Service providing food and beverages
	80	Weekly menu

QA	2.1.1	Each child's wellbeing and comfort is provided for, including appropriate opportunities to meet each child's need for sleep, rest and relaxation
	2.1.2	Effective illness and injury management and hygiene practices are promoted and implemented
	2.1.3	Healthy eating and physical activity are promoted and appropriate for each child
	2.2.1	At all times, reasonable precautions and adequate supervision ensure children are protected from harm and hazard
	3.1.1	Outdoor and indoor spaces, buildings, fixtures and fittings are suitable for their purpose, including supporting the access of every child
	3.1.2	Premises, furniture and equipment are safe, clean and well maintained

Sources

- Early Years Learning Framework 2009
- Education and Care Services National Regulations 2011
- Food Safety Information Council. *Fridge and freezer food safety*.
<https://foodsafety.asn.au/topic/fridge-freezer-foodsafety/> accessed 23 June 2025
- Food Safety Standards Australia New Zealand (Australia Only)(2021).
<https://www.foodstandards.gov.au/Pages/default.aspx> accessed 23 June 2025
- Guide to the National Quality Standard 2018
- National Health and Medical Research Council. (2013). *Staying Healthy: Preventing infectious diseases in early childhood education and care services*. 5th edition.
<https://www.nhmrc.gov.au/sites/default/files/documents/attachments/ch55-staying-healthy.pdf> accessed 23 June 2025
- Queensland Health. (2012). *Formula Feeding*.
https://www.health.qld.gov.au/data/assets/pdf_file/0026/160829/formula_feeding.pdf accessed 23 June 2025

Further reading and useful websites

- Australian Breastfeeding Association – <https://www.breastfeeding.asn.au/> accessed 23 June 2025
- Food Standards Australia New Zealand (Australia Only)
<http://www.foodstandards.gov.au/Pages/default.aspx> accessed 23 June 2025
- Nutrition Australia – <https://naqld.org/> accessed 23 June 2025
- Queensland Health – <https://www.qld.gov.au/health/staying-healthy/food-pantry> accessed 23 June 2025
- Safe Food Australia – A guide to the Food Safety Standards
<https://www.foodstandards.gov.au/publications/pages/safefoodaustralia3rd16.aspx> accessed 23 June 2025

Policy review

The Service encourages staff and parents to be actively involved in the annual review of each of its policies and procedures. In addition, the Service will accommodate any new legislative changes as they occur, and any issues identified as part the Service's commitment to quality improvement. The Service consults with relevant recognised authorities as part of the annual review to ensure the policy contents are consistent with current research and contemporary views on best practice.

Version Control

Version	Date Reviewed	Approved By	Comments/Amendments	Next Review Date
1	8 January 2018	Kaylene Harper	Updated to changed NQF requirements 1 February 2018.	January 2019
2	5 February 2019	Kaylene Harper	Policy reviewed. Sources and further readings accessed and updated.	February 2020
3	29 January 2020	Kaylene Harper	Policy reviewed. Sources and further readings accessed and updated.	January 2021
4	25 September 2020	Kaylene Harper	Reviewed policy. Accessed sources and further readings.	September 2021
5	28 September 2021	Kaylene Harper	Reviewed policy	September 2022
6	27 September 2022	Linda Hollard	Reviewed Policy Accessed sources and further readings	September 2023
7	23 August 2023	Grace McKinstry	Reviewed Policy Accessed sources and further readings	August 2024
8	1 July 2024	Tiffany Boeske	Reviewed policy Accessed sources	July 2025
9	24 June 2025	Gen Mahaki	Reviewed policy Accessed sources and further readings	June 2026