

Guidelines for Ordering Catered Meals for Functions and Events

A public health document prepared by:
Singapore Food Agency

INTRODUCTION

Catering food for functions and events such as a birthday party at home, staff lunch in the office, wedding celebrations at a function hall, or community gatherings at void decks and community centres is commonplace in Singapore. To minimise the risk of food poisoning to your guests and staff, it is recommended that you follow the food safety tips below:

GUIDELINES

1) Choosing Caterers

- a) Engage only licensed food caterers. The list of SFA-licensed caterers can be found on SFA's website (<https://www.sfa.gov.sg/food-retail/sfa-food-establishment-licenses>).
- b) Choose a licensed caterer with a good hygiene track record.

2) Ordering Food

- a) Avoid ordering raw or uncooked food, particularly if you have young children, pregnant women or the elderly as guests. If you order raw seafood (e.g. sashimi / sushi), check that these are delivered chilled at below 5°C. Once delivered to the function / event site, keep them chilled in refrigerator until ready to serve.
- b) Order enough food for your guests but do not order in excess to avoid wastage. Leftovers should be discarded and not kept for consumption later, to minimise the risks of food poisoning due to prolonged storage of the food.

3) Delivery

Food pathogens multiply rapidly between 5°C and 60°C. Always keep hot food hot above 60°C and cold food cold below 5°C. No food should be kept at room temperature for more than 4 hours from the time it was cooked at the caterer's kitchen to the time it is consumed. Remember that during packing, transport and set-up of the buffet, the food is usually kept at room temperature. You and your guests will therefore have less than 4 hours to consume the food.

- a) Request for the food to be delivered at most 1 hour before meal time and not earlier than that. This is to prevent food being kept at room temperature for extended periods of time.
- b) Check that hot food is delivered in hot boxes or insulated boxes and bags to keep the temperature above 60°C, and cold food is delivered in cooler or insulated boxes to keep the temperature below 5°C. If the caterer does not have the equipment to hot-hold or cold-hold the food at the safe temperature (above 60°C or below 5°C), please ensure that the food is consumed not later than the "CONSUME BY" time given by the caterer.
- c) Check that the caterer provides a time stamp label on the packed meal or a time stamp sign for each buffet table. This is a mandatory requirement with effect from **15 February 2012**. The time stamp informs you and your guests of the date and time that the food is cooked or prepared to a ready-to-eat state at the caterer's kitchen, and when it should be consumed by. The "CONSUME BY" time should not be later than 4 hours from the time the food is cooked or ready-to-eat and kept between 5°C and 60°C.

4) Display / Serving

- a) Once delivered, the food should be displayed in an orderly manner. Raw food should be separated from cooked / ready-to-eat food, and served with separate utensils.
- b) Check that the chafing dishes and containers for food are clean.
- c) Check that clean serving spoons, tongs, ladles and cutleries are provided.
- d) Check that the chafing dishes have attached covers. Keep the hot food covered until most of your guests have arrived. Opening the covers too early will cause rapid heat loss and bring the food temperature into the danger zone of below 60°C. Please note that the canned fuels below the chafing dishes are not able to keep food hot above 60°C, and cannot extend the shelf-life of the food.

- e) Check that cold food is kept chilled on ice.
- f) Check that the caterer displays the time stamp sign prominently. Do not remove or alter the time stamp sign. It is an offence to do so.
- g) If your event or function lasts for many hours, display only small portions of hot food at a time, and keep the rest in hot boxes or food warmers and take them out only when replenishing food on the table. This is to avoid leaving all the food at room temperature for too long. Alternatively, you can request for the caterer to deliver a second batch of fresh food at a later timing, rather than have all the food delivered at the beginning and served throughout the duration of the function or event.
- h) Check that condiments are served in single-serving packets or in clean containers with serving spoons. Packet condiments should be used up or discarded once opened.

5) Eating

- a) Inform your guests / staff to be punctual, so that the food can be consumed within the “CONSUME BY” time given by the caterers. Advise your guests / staff to clean their hands with soap and water or hand sanitizer before eating.
- b) Observe good personal and food hygiene. Use serving spoons, tongs and ladders. DO NOT taste the food with fingers or cough and sneeze into the food.
- c) Pay attention to the appearance, texture and smell of the food. DO NOT eat under-cooked food or food that you suspect are turning bad or stale.
- d) Do not consume the food past the “CONSUME BY” time on the time stamp. Any food not eaten by the “CONSUME BY” time should be discarded, as the food would have been left at room temperature for more than 4 hours. Please advise your guests/staff not to pack left-over food for consumption after the “CONSUME BY” time.

6) Clearing Up

- a) Arrange for the caterer to come and clear the left-over food and paraphernalia as soon as the meal time is over.

7) Packet Meals

- a) Check that the packet meals are delivered in hot boxes or insulated boxes and bags to keep the food hot.
- b) Check that there is a time stamp label attached to each packet. This is a mandatory requirement with effect from **15 February 2012**. The time stamp informs you and your guests of the date and time that the food is cooked or prepared to a ready-to-eat state at the caterer's kitchen, and when it should be consumed by. The "CONSUME BY" time should not be later than 4 hours from the time the food is cooked or ready-to-eat and kept between 5°C and 60°C. Do not remove or alter the time stamp label. It is an offence to do so.
- c) Once the insulated boxes or bags are opened, heat loss is rapid. Encourage your guests / staff to be punctual for meal time, so that the packets can all be collected at the same time and consumed as soon as possible within the "CONSUME BY" time given by the caterer.
- d) If there are staggered meal times, arrange for staggered delivery times with the caterer, instead of a single delivery time for all the packets. The packets for later consumption would have been left in the temperature danger zone between 5°C and 60°C for an extended period of time.
- e) Do not consume the food after the "CONSUME BY" time.
- f) Discard all uneaten food packets. Do not keep food for later consumption.
- g) Dispose all refuse and food wastes properly into bins lined with a plastic bag and with a tight-fitting lid. Do not leave garbage bags containing food wastes on the floor as pests can break the bag and gain access to the food waste within.