

THE TILDA GUIDE TO RICE HEALTH & HYGIENE

Many outbreaks of food poisoning which emerge from the catering industry are found to be caused by the inadequate cooling of food.

Particular food poisoning bacteria can survive the cooking process as spores and then germinate and multiply to dangerous levels if the food is held warm at between kitchen temperatures and 63°C for a few hours.

One of these is *Bacillus Cereus*, the spores of which are widely distributed in cereals and dried foods. This includes dry rice, which can contain low levels of these spores. However, in this form they present no risk to health.

Despite boiling rice for typically 15-20 minutes, these spores will survive the cooking process but again present no risk provided that cooked rice is:

- a) Served and eaten immediately, or
- b) Kept hot above 63°C prior to eating, or
- c) Cooled rapidly and then kept refrigerated or frozen until required

In comparison, warm cooked rice provides ideal conditions for these safe spores to germinate and then multiply sufficiently to produce the toxin which causes food poisoning.

Keeping cooked rice warm is regularly implicated in *Bacillus Cereus* food poisonings and is quoted in most textbooks on food poisoning.

However, by following safe and sensible kitchen practices which apply usually to many other foods, this risk can be totally avoided and caterers can continue to let their customers benefit from one of the most natural and healthy foods available.

The 10 Commandments of Safe Rice Handling

1. Always keep dry rice in cool, dry conditions off the floor.
2. Do not expose dry rice to moisture as this can encourage mould growth.
3. Never leave cooked rice to cool on its own. Always chill it quickly either under running cold water or spread thinly on trays in a blast chiller.
4. If cooked rice is to be kept hot e.g. on a serving counter, ensure it is always above 63°C.
5. Avoid keeping rice hot for more than 2 hours and throw away any leftovers.
6. If cooked rice had been chilled or frozen ensure that it is thoroughly reheated and is piping hot throughout.
7. Cold rice salads should be kept chilled. If part of a buffet, they should not be kept at room temperature for longer than 1 hour.
8. Never re-chill once it has been kept at room temperature – throw it away.
9. Never keep rice chilled for longer than 3 days or frozen for longer than 1 month.
10. Once cooked rice has been re-heated, throw away any leftovers. Never re-heat rice more than once.