

Big functions v storage space: Advice on how to strike the right balance

In recent months this department had to investigate a food poisoning outbreak following a party. The outcome of this investigation was that some of the high-risk food had been stored out of temperature control throughout the night and part of the following morning prior to the party. The main reason behind this was that the person who prepared and cooked the food did not have enough space to store it adequately.

This example is somewhat extreme, but it clearly highlights the dangers that a lack of appropriate storage for ready to eat foodstuffs can have on human health.

However extreme this case is, this issue of storage is one that Babergh's Food Officers have encountered time and again during their routine inspections. We therefore would like to remind you of those simple rules that could make a difference:

■ **Do not prepare ready to eat food items too early before serving (remember that storage of chilled products above 8°C is only permitted for a maximum of 4 hours, so take this into account when preparing sandwich fillings for example).**

■ **Reheated food must be piping hot, inadequate or uneven reheating will only activate bacteria rather than kill them.**

■ **Hot food must be stored at 63°C, if below it must be consumed or disposed of within a maximum of 2 hours.**

■ **Cool food as rapidly as possible (to below 8°C, but ideally between 0°C - 5°C) and protect it from contamination. Remember that if cooked food items get contaminated during cooling, harmful bacteria will start growing and may reach dangerous levels after 90 minutes.**

■ **Ensure you have enough storage space. Financial considerations may encourage you to book big func-**



tions or a lot of small ones at the same time, but you should only accept them if you have enough storage space. You may also need to tailor your menu to accommodate your storage space.

■ **Store food in containers that make the best use of your fridge space. It's best not to plate out the food until the time of serving so that all your nicely presented and awkwardly shaped trays will not take all the space in your fridges.**

■ **Document your procedures. If you cater for large numbers regularly or even just occasionally make sure that the rules you need to follow to do this safely are documented in your Food Safety Management System.**