

# BASIC PRINCIPLES

for the preparation of  
safe food for infants and  
young children



World Health Organization  
Geneva

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# COOK FOOD ..... THOROUGHLY .....

**MANY** raw foods, notably poultry, raw milk and vegetables, are very often contaminated with disease-causing organisms. Thorough cooking will kill these organisms. For this purpose, all parts of the food must become steaming hot, which means they must reach a minimum temperature of 70 °C. ■

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# AVOID STORING COOKED FOOD

**PREPARE** food for infants and young children freshly, and give it to them immediately after preparation when it is cool enough to eat. Foods prepared for infants and young children should preferably not be stored at all. If this is impossible, food could be stored only for the next meal, but kept cool (at temperatures below 10 °C) or hot (at temperatures near or above 60 °C). Before consuming stored food, it should be reheated thoroughly. Again, this means that all parts of the food must reach at least 70 °C. ■

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# **AVOID CONTACT BETWEEN RAW FOODSTUFFS AND COOKED FOODS**

**COOKED** food can become contaminated through even the slightest contact with raw food. This cross-contamination can be direct, as, for example, when raw food comes into contact with cooked food. It can also be indirect and subtle: for example, through hands, flies, utensils or unclean surfaces. Thus, hands should be washed after handling high-risk foods, e.g. poultry. Similarly, utensils used for raw foods should be carefully washed before they are used again for cooked food. The addition of any new ingredient to cooked food may again introduce pathogenic organisms. In this case, food needs to be thoroughly cooked again. ■

# WASH FRUITS AND VEGETABLES

**FRUITS** and vegetables, particularly if they are given to infants in raw form, must be washed carefully with safe water. If possible, vegetables and fruits should be peeled. In situations when these foods are likely to be heavily contaminated, for example when untreated waste water is used for irrigation or untreated nightsoil is used for soil fertilization, fruits and vegetables which cannot be peeled should be thoroughly cooked before they are given to infants. ■

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## USE SAFE WATER

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**SAFE** water is just as important in preparing food for infants and young children as it is for drinking. Water used in preparing food should be boiled, unless the food to which the water is added has subsequently to be cooked (e.g., rice, potatoes). Remember that ice made with unsafe water will also be unsafe. ■



## WASH HANDS REPEATEDLY

**WASH** hands thoroughly before you start preparing or serving food and after every interruption – especially if you have changed the baby, used the toilet, or been in contact with animals. It should be remembered that household animals often harbour germs that can pass from hands to food. ■

# AVOID FEEDING INFANTS WITH A BOTTLE

**USE** a cup to give drinks and liquid foods to children. It is usually difficult to get bottles and teats completely clean. Cups, spoons, dishes and utensils used for preparing and feeding infants should be washed right after use. This will facilitate their thorough cleaning. If bottles and teats must be used, they should be thoroughly washed and boiled after every use. ■

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# PROTECT FOODS FROM INSECTS, RODENTS AND OTHER ANIMALS

**ANIMALS** frequently carry pathogenic organisms and are potential sources of contamination of food. ■

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# STORE NON-PERISHABLE FOODSTUFFS IN A SAFE PLACE

**KEEP** pesticides, disinfecting agents or other toxic chemicals in labelled containers and separate from foodstuffs. To protect against rodents and insects, non-perishable foodstuffs should be stored in closed containers. Containers which have previously held toxic chemicals should not be used for storing foodstuffs. ■

# KEEP ALL FOOD PREPARATION PREMISES METICULOUSLY CLEAN

**SURFACES** used for food preparation must be kept absolutely clean in order to avoid food contamination. Scraps of food and crumbs are potential reservoirs of germs and can attract insects and animals. Garbage should be kept in safe, covered places and be disposed of quickly. ■

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The World Health Organization estimates that every year some 1500 million episodes of diarrhoea occur worldwide in children under the age of five, and over 3 million die as a result. Diarrhoeal diseases are also a major underlying factor in malnutrition.

Up to 70% of diarrhoeal disease episodes may be foodborne and transmitted through food contaminated during preparation.

The recommendations outlined in this leaflet provide basic principles for the preparation of safe food for infants and young children. The observation of these principles by mothers or other caregivers will contribute to the prevention of diarrhoea and associated malnutrition.



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