

Doggy Bags

The term 'doggy bag' refers to the leftovers of a restaurant meal that are taken home for the family pet. However, many customers consume these leftovers themselves. Once a doggy bag is given out, it becomes the property of the consumer. Therefore, it is the responsibility of the consumer to store and handle this food safely to minimise the risk of food poisoning.

The law

The Victorian Food Act 1984 does not prohibit restaurants and cafes from giving doggy bags to customers, but this food may become unsafe for human consumption. It is at the discretion of the food business whether they provide this service or not.

Associated risks

Doggy bags differ from normal takeaway food items that are intended to be eaten away from the premises and are served in a takeaway container at the appropriate temperature: hot foods are served hot at 60°C or higher and cold foods at 5°C or lower. Doggy bags can be exposed to the following hazards:

- Food kept unrefrigerated for too long.
- Food that has been kept for too long.
- Food that has not been suitably reheated.
- Food that has been touched with unwashed hands.
- Food that has been transported and/or stored incorrectly.

Minimising risks

Proprietor	Consumer
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Include a procedure in your Food Safety Program for dealing with doggy bags. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Follow the advice given by the restaurant.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Advise the customer against giving the doggy bag to any high risk group (the elderly, babies, people who are immunocompromised) or persons with food allergies. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Refrigerate the food as soon as possible. Discard any food that has been unrefrigerated for longer than two hours: this may be unsafe due to bacterial growth.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Advise customer that some foods may not be suitable for a 'doggy bag' e.g. If it has been outside temperature control for a given period (for service or display), or if it has already been reheated. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reheat food until piping/steaming hot all the way through.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Document information such as date, time, food and advice given. (Recording this information may be helpful in the case of a consumer taking legal action against a proprietor for selling unsafe food. The records would demonstrate responsible action being taken on the part of the proprietor). 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Discard any uneaten food within 24 hours.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Transfer food into new, unused food-grade containers. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Do not give the food to high risk groups and/or persons with food allergies.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provide suitable labels for all products leaving the premises, such as the example below. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • If in doubt, throw it out.

Example label

Business Name: _____

Doggy Bag Warning

We hoped you enjoyed your meal.

Food taken away from this premises needs to be responsibly handled to ensure product safety.

In the interest of public health please ensure this food is consumed within 2 hours or alternatively:

- Refrigerate this food within 2 hours.
- Reheat the food to piping/steaming hot prior to consumption.
- Discard food if not consumed within 24 hours.

Date: _____ Time: _____

For more information, see:

[Food safety when eating out](#) Department of Health and Human Services Victoria

Or contact your Environmental Health Officer at the at the Health Services Branch on **9658 8831**.