



Keeping Cooked Rice Safe

Introduction

Few people realise that cooked rice is the cause of many food poisoning episodes. Uncooked rices can contain bacteria called *Bacillus cereus* which can form protective spores that survive the cooking process. If the cooked rice is cooled too slowly these spores can germinate and produce a toxin that induces vomiting. Reheating the rice will not kill all the bacteria cells or toxins and will not make the rice safe. Cooked rice that contains this toxin produced by *Bacillus cereus*, will not look, smell or taste any different to normal rice.

Symptoms of Infection

Should you consume cooked rice that is tainted with *Bacillus cereus* toxin you may experience the following symptoms, nausea and vomiting within 1 to 6 hours, which may be followed by diarrhoea within 10-12 hours. Usually symptoms dissipate within 12-24 hours.

To best ensure that cooked rice is safe for eating the following measures can be taken:

- If cooking rice in advance, do not cook too much at any one time as large amounts take too long to cool.
- Either, keep cooked rice above 60°C or cool rice as quickly as possible. To cool rice quickly, remove from the hot container and divide into clean shallow containers that are kept separate, not stacked. Alternatively cool the rice in a colander under cold running water.
- Cover cooked rice and store in a refrigerator (<5°C).
- Use a stock rotation system to ensure that the oldest rice is used first (*first in, first out* rule).

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