

FOOD POISONING

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INTRODUCTION

It is estimated that a third of food poisoning is a result of poor food handling in domestic situations. Children, the elderly and people who are ill have a reduced level of immunity to illness and are more vulnerable to food poisoning.

Food poisoning bacteria (pathogens) may not change the way a food product looks, tastes or smells. Most pathogens are killed when food is thoroughly cooked but some produce toxins or spores that survive the cooking process.

To prevent food poisoning you must:

- Keep pathogens out of food
- Stop pathogens growing in food

KEEPING PATHOGENS OUT OF FOOD (CROSS CONTAMINATION)

Keeping pathogens out of food:

- Keep your kitchen clean to reduce the possibility of contamination and remove food sources for pests and pathogens.
- Keep your kitchen free of pests and vermin. Pest insects such as cockroaches and flies, together with rats and mice, can transfer pathogens to your food benches, equipment and the food itself.
- Minimise cross contamination.

Cross contamination occurs when pathogens are transferred from a contaminated surface to one that is not contaminated. The bacteria and viruses can come from people, work surfaces or equipment, and other foods. For example, it can happen when bacteria from the surface of raw meat, poultry and raw vegetables with visible dirt (such as unwashed potatoes), are transferred on to ready to eat food such as green salads, rice or pasta salads, cooked meats or poultry or even fruit. The bacteria on the raw food are killed when the food is cooked, but the ready to eat food is eaten without further cooking - bacteria and all.

HOW ARE THE BACTERIA TRANSFERRED?

Hands are among the obvious culprits in transferring bacteria from raw to ready to eat food but direct contact with raw foods, dirty chopping boards, knives and other cooking implements can also spread the contamination. Chopping boards, plates and knives that have been in contact with raw food need to be carefully washed with warm water and detergent, then rinsed and thoroughly dried before being used for ready to eat foods.

Incorrectly storing raw food in the fridge by allowing it to come into direct contact with ready to eat foods or allowing raw meat juices to drip onto cooked foods, fruit and other ready to eat food, can also cause cross contamination. Raw foods should always be treated as though they were contaminated.

HOW SHOULD RAW AND READY TO EAT FOOD BE STORED?

Raw food, such as meat, poultry or fish, should be stored in a rigid container or at the bottom of the fridge to prevent it coming into contact with ready to eat food or allowing meat juices to drip onto other food. Ready to eat food should be stored covered in the fridge to further reduce the risks.

WHAT KIND OF CHOPPING BOARD IS BEST TO AVOID CROSS CONTAMINATION?

In the home it really doesn't matter whether you have wooden, plastic or glass chopping boards as long as they are kept really clean and in good condition. The porous nature of wood makes it advisable to use plastic or glass chopping boards for raw meat, poultry and seafood. It may be easier to have two boards: one for raw food and one for ready to eat food. All chopping boards should be scrubbed with hot water and detergent after preparing raw foods. Plastic chopping boards are good as they can be washed at high temperatures in the dishwasher. However, any board should be replaced when its surface becomes scratched because bacteria can hide in the scratches.

WHEN SHOULD I WASH MY HANDS?

Always wash and dry your hands:

- Before touching or eating food.
- After touching raw meat, fish, chicken, or unwashed vegetables.
- After using the toilet.
- After blowing your nose.
- After touching a pet.

HOW SHOULD I WASH MY HANDS?

Wet hands, rub together well to build up a good lather with soap (don't forget the back of your hands), between the fingers and under nails. Rinse well in warm water and dry thoroughly on a clean towel.

STOPPING PATHOGENS GROWING IN FOOD

To grow, pathogens need food and moisture, time to multiply and warmth. Given enough of these key needs, pathogens can double every 20 minutes, which means that after one hour a single pathogen will have risen to 64 pathogens and after 4 hours that number would have risen to over 4000 pathogens.

How do you stop pathogens growing in food?

- Cook foods until they are steaming hot (internal temperature greater than 60°C) and maintain this until the food is served. This will kill the majority of pathogens.
- Keep cold food in the fridge and make sure that the fridge is cold. Your fridge should be able to keep your food at a temperature of 5°C or less to minimise growth of pathogens.
- Thaw food on the lowest shelf in fridge overnight OR in the microwave on defrost setting. Food left out overnight on the kitchen bench will allow pathogens to multiply rapidly over the surface and defrosted part of the food, while the middle is still thawing out.

- Heat leftover foods thoroughly and quickly to greater than 60°C. Make sure that you stir the food part way through cooking to ensure that there are no cold spots or areas where pathogens are not killed off.
- Cool food quickly. Food can be left out until it stops steaming. It should then be placed into the refrigerator. Placing food that is too hot in your fridge may damage the refrigerator and increase the temperature of the other foods stored in it.
- Don't keep leftovers for more than two days.

6 KEY TIPS

And for safety's sake remember the 6 key tips:

- Keep hot food steaming hot
- Keep cold food refrigerated
- Cook food properly
- Separate raw and cooked foods
- Keep kitchen and utensils clean
- Wash hands with soap and dry thoroughly

WHAT SHOULD I DO IF I GET SICK?

What should you do when you have suspected food poisoning? Seek medical attention. Food poisoning can be particularly serious in young children, the elderly and people of all ages in poor health. Early medical attention is recommended, especially for these at-risk groups.

Contact the City's Environmental Health Service and report the illness. It probably wasn't the last meal you ate, but if you have any food samples, keep them for analysis. If you are feeling unwell visit your doctor. Some types of food poisoning are life threatening and early diagnosis can help avoid severe consequences.

Remember, food that makes you sick can still look fresh and tasty.

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

If you would like additional information on food poisoning, please contact:

City of Karratha, Environmental Health

Ph: (08) 9186 8555

E-mail: enquiries@karratha.wa.gov.au

Website: [Food safety | City of Karratha](#)

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