

**HEALTH MATTERS - FOOD HYGIENE - PART 1**

For the next few weeks I am looking at food safety.  With summer just around the corner it is especially important to think about food hygiene when preparing and cooking food.

**Prepare and cook food safely**

Studies show that the kitchen contains the most germs in the home.

One found that the kitchen sink contains 100,000 times more germs than the bathroom.

Germs such as E coli, Campylobacter and Salmonella enter the kitchen on our hands, on raw food and through our pets. They can rapidly spread if we're not careful.

If food isn't cooked, stored and handled correctly, people can become ill with [food poisoning](http://www.nhs.uk/conditions/food-poisoning/pages/introduction.aspx), colds, flu and other conditions.  More on safe storage next time.

**Washing hands**

Our hands are one of the main ways germs are spread, so it's important to wash them thoroughly with soap and warm water

* before cooking
* after touching the bin
* going to the toilet
* before and after touching raw food.

Raw meat, including poultry, can contain harmful bacteria that can spread easily to anything it touches. This includes other food, worktops, tables, chopping boards, and knives.

Lots of people think they should wash raw chicken, but there's no need according to food hygiene experts. “Any germs on it will be killed if you cook it thoroughly. In fact, if you do wash chicken, you could splash germs on to the sink, worktop, dishes or anything else nearby.”

Some people believe freezing chicken kills germs such as Campylobacter. The freezing process does reduce Campylobacter levels, but does not eliminate it completely. The safest way to kill all traces of Campylobacter is by cooking poultry thoroughly. Take particular care to keep raw food away from ready-to-eat foods such as bread, salad and fruit. These foods won't be cooked before you eat them, so any germs that get on to them won't be killed.

Different chopping boards should be used for raw and ready-to-eat foods.  When storing raw meat, always keep it in a clean, sealed container and place it on the bottom shelf of the fridge, where it can't touch or drip on to other foods.

**Cooking**

Cooking food at the right temperature will ensure that any harmful bacteria are killed. Check that food is piping hot throughout before you eat it.  The foods below need to be cooked thoroughly before eating:

* poultry
* pork
* offal, including liver
* burgers
* sausages
* rolled joints of meat
* kebabs

When cooking burgers, sausages, chicken and pork, cut into the middle to check that the meat is no longer pink, the juices run clear and it's piping hot (steam is coming out).  When cooking a whole chicken or other bird, pierce the thickest part of the leg (between the drumstick and the thigh) to check there is no pink meat and that the juices are no longer pink or red.   Pork joints and rolled joints shouldn't be eaten pink or rare. To check when these types of joint are ready to eat, put a skewer into the centre of the meat and check that there is no pink meat and the juices run clear.

It is safe to serve steak and other whole cuts of beef and lamb rare (not cooked in the middle) or blue (seared on the outside) as long as they have been properly sealed (cooked quickly at a high temperature on the outside only) to kill any bacteria on the meat's surface.

If you've cooked food that you're not going to eat immediately, cool it at room temperature (ideally within 90 minutes) and store it in the fridge. Putting hot food in the fridge means it doesn't cool evenly, which can cause food poisoning. Find out more about [storing leftovers safely](http://www.nhs.uk/Livewell/homehygiene/Pages/food-leftovers-safety.aspx) next time.

Experts’ advice is to store food in the fridge below 5C - “If your fridge has an internal freezer compartment that is iced up, the fridge could struggle to maintain its temperature.”

**More on food hygiene next time.**

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That’s it for this week.  Until next time,

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