

How germ free is your kitchen?

The kitchen can be a place where germs can thrive if some basic rules are not followed. Food poisoning can result. Infections can easily spread to other family members.

What are the problem areas?

The main reasons why food poisoning occurs are;

- ❖ not cooking food properly
- ❖ preparing food too far in advance
- ❖ storing food wrongly
- ❖ cross-contamination (germs moving from one area to another)
- ❖ infected people preparing or handling food

What are the high-risk foods?

Certain raw foods (especially chicken and meat) or ingredients have a high risk of carrying germs. The main ones are:

- ❖ poultry and red meat (Campylobacter, Salmonella, E. coli)
- ❖ eggs (Salmonella)
- ❖ cooked rice (Bacillus cereus)
- ❖ dairy products (Listeria, Salmonella, Staphylococcus aureus)
- ❖ raw and undercooked eggs (Salmonella)
- ❖ soft cheeses (Listeria)
- ❖ salads, fruit and vegetables (Salmonella, Norovirus)
- ❖ shellfish/seafood (Hepatitis A virus)

How to germs spread?

Germs can be on the surface of food as well as inside the food. The packaging can also be contaminated (spoilt). Did you know that.....

- ❖ Whenever you handle food, put it on a surface or cut it up, germs will be transferred to these surfaces and your hands?
- ❖ If you wipe surfaces with a cloth, the cloth then becomes contaminated?
- ❖ If you then use the cloth to clean other surfaces, you will spread the germs to these surfaces?
- ❖ If you open the kitchen cupboards, answer the telephone or turn on the taps to wash your hands, these surfaces will also be contaminated?
- ❖ In the washing-up bowl, germs can spread from a contaminated chopping board, knife or cloth to plates, cups and eating utensils?

How do I reduce germs spreading?

Try to practice the following:

- ❖ Hand washing after visiting toilet and before preparing, serving or eating food (with preferably liquid soap and warm running water) then drying thoroughly is the most important way to avoid spreading infection
- ❖ Clean food preparation surfaces immediately after preparing high-risk foods and before you start other tasks. Germs can survive for up to 24 hours even on dry surfaces
- ❖ Clean crockery, eating and cooking utensils in detergent and hot water. Rinse and dry
- ❖ Use the right cleaning materials for the job:
 - Detergents such as washing up liquids are designed to dissolve grease, oil and dirt
 - Disinfectants, such as bleach, are designed to kill germs. These are powerful agents and should not be used carefully
 - Anti-bacterial cleaners are types of disinfectant and can kill germs - often in spray form

- ❖ For surfaces unable to be properly rinsed, clean with warm soapy water (liquid detergent) followed by a disinfectant such as diluted household bleach (follow dilution instructions on bottle and use clean cloth or disposable wipe)
- ❖ Use separate cloths/sponges for separate tasks. Where possible use disposable cloths. If using them more than once, wash in hot water and soap then place in a suitable disinfectant, rinse thoroughly and allow to dry. Do not soak overnight as disinfectant solutions weaken and may allow bacteria to grow. Use separate buckets, cloths etc for cleaning floors.
- ❖ Keep a separate chopping board for high-risk foods. Salmonella can be very difficult to remove from surfaces. It is advisable to clean and disinfect the chopping board after cutting raw meat and poultry
- ❖ Drying surfaces and keeping them dry is an important part of hygiene
- ❖ Use one kitchen surface area (preferably close to the sink and waste disposal) for preparing raw foods, and reserve another area for handling cooked foods, cutting bread, making sandwiches, etc.
- ❖ Tea towels can be a source of cross-contamination so use them sparingly; make sure they dry out after you've used them. Change them regularly and wash in a hot wash cycle. Preferably, use disposable cloths or paper towels.
- ❖ If you have a dishwasher use the right amounts of salt and detergent and keep the filter and all surfaces clean. The highest temperature cycle will be most effective against germs.
- ❖ Keep all food cupboards clean, cool, tidy and dry. When you take cans from the cupboard, before opening wipe over the tops to remove any dust. And don't forget to clean the can opener.
- ❖ Kitchen rubbish bins are an obvious breeding ground for germs, so empty them regularly – especially in the summer. Use a lidded bin and a bin liner. Tie up the rubbish bags before removing them to avoid food waste spilling onto the floor. Even with a liner, bins get dirty so clean them out with hot water and disinfectant at regular intervals.
- ❖ Insects, birds and rodents should be kept out of the kitchen. Throw out any food they come into contact with. Control flies and wasps with an insecticidal strip (do not use aerosol sprays in the kitchen). Use traps for mice and rats. If the pest problem is serious, seek professional advice from your local environmental health department or a commercial pest control agency.
- ❖ Keep pets away from your food and food preparation areas and wash your hands after touching them. Give them their own feeding bowls and clean these separately from other utensils.
- ❖ Give your kitchen a thorough 'spring clean'

Need further advice or information?

- ❖ NHS Inform www.nhsinform.co.uk
- ❖ NHS24 ☎ 111 www.nhs24.co.uk
- ❖ www.nhsborders.scot.nhs.uk
- ❖ Local health clinic or GP

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