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English

How Safe is Your Kitchen?

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How Safe Is Your Kitchen?

Having a clean, spotless kitchen is no guarantee of avoiding food poisoning. Many people don't realise that most cases of food poisoning are caused by leaving food to stand, cooked or uncooked, at room temperature. This makes it easy for harmful germs on food to multiply - especially in warmer weather.

It's sometimes obvious when food has gone "off" - it smells bad, feels slimy or is growing a mould - but not always! Sometimes food that looks and smells okay isn't safe to eat because food poisoning germs don't make the food look, smell or taste "off". You can reduce the risk of food poisoning by following these simple rules:

Shopping. Don't buy food in a package that looks swollen when it shouldn't be - this means the food may have spoiled. Make sure you take frozen food or any perishable food home as soon as possible and freeze or refrigerate immediately. If you're likely to be delayed reaching home, take along an insulated container to keep food cool.

In The Fridge. Raw meat, poultry and fish may have harmful germs on them which are killed by thorough cooking. But if these raw foods touch foods which won't have further cooking, these foods may be contaminated by germs from the raw food. This is why it's important to keep cooked foods covered and to store them above raw foods in the fridge.

Defrosting Food. Allow meat, poultry and fish to defrost slowly in the fridge, or defrost in a microwave. Harmful germs can grow on these

foods if left to defrost at room temperature. Don't refreeze these raw foods once they have thawed out - refrigerate them for up to 24 hours or cook them immediately then refreeze.

Preparing Food. Always wash your hands with soap and water before preparing food to prevent germs on your hands from contaminating food. This is especially important after using the toilet, handling pets or using a handkerchief. Always wash fresh fruit and vegetables. Make sure you wash chopping boards, knives - and your hands - carefully with hot water and detergent after using them to cut raw meat, poultry and fish. Any germs left on chopping boards, knives or hands can contaminate other foods. Never allow pets' dishes to come into contact with plates of food.

Keep cooked food either very hot or very cold. This means that hot food should be served very hot, and cold food should be served from the fridge (or a cooler, if you're at a picnic). This is especially important for seafoods, dishes containing meat, rice dishes or desserts containing cream, imitation cream or eggs. Leaving these foods to sit outside the fridge or cooler before serving encourages harmful bacteria to grow.

If you cook hot food to eat later, refrigerate immediately in the fridge. Dividing into smaller portions helps it cool more quickly. Make sure poultry is thoroughly cooked - if it's pink in the middle it's not fully cooked.

Takeway Food. Always eat it while it's still hot. If you don't plan to eat it straight away, refrigerate it immediately and reheat until very hot. What if you see takeaway food being kept at room temperature instead of being refrigerated or kept hot? Don't buy it - even if the shop offers to microwave it. It may not be safe to eat.