

# FOOD SAFETY



**PREVENTION OF FOODBORNE  
ILLNESS OR FOOD POISONING**



## What causes food poisoning?

Campylobacter and Salmonella bacteria are the most common causes of foodborne illness in Malta. Contaminated food can still look, smell, and taste good.

These bacteria are spread through contamination with faeces from infected animals and people. Contaminated foods are often of animal origin, such as raw poultry (including chicken, duck, poultry, quail) and meat, raw or undercooked eggs and unpasteurized milk or milk products. However, any food can be contaminated, including fresh fruit, vegetables and water.



## How are Campylobacter and Salmonella bacteria spread?

In the kitchen, transmission occurs mainly through inadequate cooking and improper handling of raw meat and poultry, leading to cross-contamination. Cross-contamination occurs when bacteria spread from raw meat to ready-to-eat food. For example, when one uses the same chopping board for raw poultry and then salad without washing it thoroughly in between.

Food can also become contaminated due to poor handwashing during food preparation. Pets, especially birds and reptiles (such as snakes, turtles, and lizards such as iguanas, bearded dragons etc) as well as farm animals (such as chickens, ducks, and geese) can carry the bacteria and cause infection if proper hand hygiene is not followed after handling them.



## What are the symptoms?

These bacteria usually cause severe diarrhoea, abdominal pain, fever, nausea, and sometimes vomiting. Symptoms can be severe, requiring hospitalisation.

Symptoms develop after a few hours to a few days after exposure depending on the type of bacteria. Salmonella symptoms appear after 6 to 72 hours and usually resolve within 7 days. Campylobacter symptoms appear 1 to 10 days after being infected and can last up to 10 days.

## Who is most at risk?

Anyone who is exposed to these bacteria can get ill, but young children under 5 years of age, older people over 65 years of age and people with weakened immune systems are at greater risk of getting more severe symptoms.



## What treatment is there?

Most people recover without treatment within 5-7 days. During this time, it is important to take plenty of fluids and use oral rehydration solutions to avoid dehydration. Severe infections may require treatment with antibiotics after medical consultation. Some cases may need admission to hospital for further care.

## How can you avoid them?

**Practice good kitchen hygiene. Keep clean!**



Thoroughly wash and clean all cooking utensils, chopping boards, and kitchen surfaces before food preparation.



Wash your hands with warm water and soap after using the restroom, after touching animals, before handling any food, and often during food preparation especially when handling raw meat.



Protect kitchen areas and food from insects, pests, and other animals.



Avoid handling food if you have a wound or skin infection on your hands or if you have symptoms of gastroenteritis.



Remove jewellery such as rings, bracelets, and watches when preparing food, as such items can harbour bacteria.

## Avoid Cross-Contamination. Separate raw meat from ready-to-eat food!



Keep raw meats (including poultry and seafood) and eggs separate from ready-to-eat foods such as vegetables, fruit, and bread.



Use separate equipment and utensils such as knives and colour-coded cutting boards for raw meat and ready-to-eat foods.



Store raw meats in sealed containers in the fridge and pack them in separate cooler bags from ready-to-eat food.



Cover and store raw meats at the bottom of the fridge so juices cannot drip onto other foods and contaminate them.



Do not wash raw poultry before cooking, as it can spread germs around the kitchen, contaminating surfaces and utensils.

## Keep food at safe temperatures



Keep food at safe temperatures (hot foods at 63°C or above, chilled food at 5°C or below, frozen foods at -18°C or below).



Do not leave cooked food outside at room temperature for longer than 1 hour, especially during summer.



During shopping, purchase chilled foods last. Place them in cooler bags until you arrive home and then refrigerate promptly.



Do not place hot food directly in the fridge. Cool the food down quickly by placing it in shallow and small containers before refrigeration.



Any left-over food should be refrigerated and consumed within 2 days.



Do not thaw frozen food at room temperature. Defrost frozen meats in the fridge before cooking.

## Cook food thoroughly



Cook or reheat food thoroughly to 75°C or higher and keep food piping hot (over 63°C) until serving.

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When reheating foods like soups and stews, bring them to a boil and stir well.

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Poultry and pork meat must be cooked well done with no pink meat. Juices must run clear.

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Minced meat products such as burgers and sausages must also be cooked to a core temperature of 75°C and not consumed raw or half-done.

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Use a food thermometer to ensure that your food is thoroughly cooked.

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## Use safe raw materials



Purchase fresh and wholesome food from licensed outlets.

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Always use an approved source of water.

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Do not use food beyond its use-by date.

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Wash fruits and vegetables, especially if eaten raw.

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Choose foods processed for safety e.g., pasteurised milk.

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For further information call on:

**2326 6000**

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