

# Food Safety Week

## *The Health Column*

2 Nov  
2016

The 20th Australian Food Safety Week will be held from 6-12 November 2016. The theme for this year is 'raw and risky' foods, following major food poisoning outbreaks in recent years. These outbreaks have been linked to risky raw foods such as unpasteurised milk, raw eggs, bean/seed sprouts, frozen berries and lettuce. It is estimated that each year 4.1 million people get food poisoning in Australia, 1 million Australians have to visit a doctor due to food poisoning, 32,000 people end up in hospital, and 86 people die.



The Australian Food Safety Week is a major event of the Food Safety Information Council, and there are plenty of ways that everyone can get involved. There is a 'Raw and risky' foods quiz available online to test your knowledge about how to reduce your risk of food poisoning from foods that are raw and risky (available at <http://foodsafety.asn.au/quizzes/>), and suggestions for events to hold and things to do are also available at <http://foodsafety.asn.au/australian-food-safety-week-2016/>.

The term 'food poisoning' refers to the illnesses that are caused by eating or drinking contaminated food or drink. Symptoms of food poisoning can range from mild to very severe, and can include one or more of the following symptoms: nausea, stomach cramps, diarrhoea, vomiting, fever, and headaches. Symptoms will usually take between a few hours to a few days to appear, and may last for a few days, depending on the cause of the food poisoning.

So what can we do to reduce our risk of becoming sick with food poisoning? The Food Safety Information Council provides the following basic recommendations:

- **Clean:** having clean hands will greatly decrease the chance of food poisoning and other diseases occurring. Wash hands with warm soapy water for 20 seconds, dry hands for 20 seconds before starting to cook, and repeat frequently, especially after handling raw meats, or vegetables with visible soil. Wash utensils and cutting boards with warm water and soap and dry thoroughly before handling different types of foods. This is particularly important when handling raw meats and vegetables.
- **Chill:** foods that should be chilled (e.g. meat, poultry, dairy foods, vegetables, salad ingredients) should be refrigerated at or below 5°C as soon as possible after purchase. A fridge thermometer should be used to make sure the temperature is at or below 5°C, and the temperature should be adjusted in line with changing seasons and the amount stored.

Leftovers should be refrigerated promptly, and cooked food should be stored in covered containers and either put in the fridge to cool, or frozen immediately. Frozen foods should be defrosted in the fridge.

- **Cook:** cooking food properly minimises the risk of food poisoning. Serve hot food steaming hot above 60°C, and always follow cooking instructions on packaged foods. Chicken, minced or boned meats, hamburger, stuffed meats and sausages should be cooked right through until they reach 75°C using a meat thermometer. Frozen poultry and rolled and stuffed meats should be defrosted thoroughly before cooking.
- **Separate:** cross-contamination is a major way for food borne diseases to spread. Raw and cooked foods should be kept separate when storing and preparing to avoid cross-contamination. Food should be stored in covered containers in the fridge, and raw meats and poultry should be placed in the bottom of the fridge so the juices do not contaminate food on lower shelves. Do not put cooked meat back on the plate the raw meat was on.

Food poisoning is often a nasty experience. Your local pharmacist can provide advice on the most appropriate treatment for your individual situation. Some people may be more vulnerable to, or affected more by the symptoms of food poisoning. These include:

- children younger than 5 years old
- pregnant women
- people older than 70 years of age with certain underlying conditions
- people with compromised immune systems through chronic or acute ill health and some conditions and treatments.

People with vomiting and diarrhoea from any cause should stay home from work or school and drink plenty of fluids. Where possible, people should avoid preparing food at home when unwell and for two days after their symptoms have cleared. They may still spread some illnesses through food for this period of time after their symptoms have stopped.

You can get the most appropriate advice for your situation from your local pharmacist. Your local community pharmacy is your health destination, and Self Care Fact Cards such as Vomiting and diarrhoea are available from pharmacies providing the Pharmaceutical Society of Australia's Self Care health information program. Other fact cards such as *Travel health* may also be helpful depending on your individual needs – ask your pharmacist.

For the nearest Self Care pharmacy location phone the Pharmaceutical Society of Australia on 1300 369 772, or go to [www.psa.org.au/selfcare](http://www.psa.org.au/selfcare), then click 'Find a *Self Care pharmacy* near you'.