

Food Safe

Food Safe is an important part of any community kitchen. Since people's level of understanding varies, it's important to speak about Food Safe at the beginning and throughout your time together in the kitchen. Do not assume that everyone holds similar knowledge. That's a serious mistake. It is recommended that at least one person in your kitchen take a Food Safe course.

Food Safe Courses are offered on a regular basis. The CK Coordinator should have a listing of these courses. The FOODSAFE website (<http://www.foodsafe.ca/>) will also provide information on instructors and courses in or near your community

There is a lot of Food Safe information out there and at times it can be somewhat overwhelming. There is a book called **Everybody's Food Safe Kitchen**, written by a woman who lives on Salt Spring Island, Sheri Nielson. This reader friendly book gives you all the food safe information you'll need without losing you in the technical and scientific warfare!

Sheri has generously allowed us to share some of her book's information with you. The following is an excerpt from her book.

For Your Information!

Microbe - life form that may only be seen with a compound microscope, eg. bacteria, protozoa, molds, viruses, etc.

Pathogens - any disease causing microorganism or toxin.

Cross-Contamination - occurs when pathogens are transferred from a raw food or infected person to a food, or to a surface such as a counter top, cutting board, utensil or dish and then to food.

Temperature

Temperature is your most powerful tool in destroying or slowing the growth of microbes.

High temperatures for sufficient periods of time will destroy the microbes that can grow in food and make people ill. If you heat food to 170°F(77°C) for several minutes, you will destroy any disease causing microbes in the food.

But, how can we even think of cooking a medium-rare prime rib at this temperature? Then, time becomes our ally. With correct cooking temperatures for the correct amount of time, we can destroy pathogens on the surface of a whole cut of meat provided that it has been properly prepared.

It was thought by some that freezing temperatures would eventually kill microbes. This is not always the case, as many pathogenic microbes survive freezing. By controlling temperatures, we control how quickly microbes will grow in numbers or die.

Kitchen Sanitation

Contrary to popular belief, a squeaky clean kitchen won't, by itself, prevent food poisoning. It certainly helps, but remember we are dealing with the world of pathogenic microbiology - an unseen but ever present danger.

Here, we must again use our imagination. Our kitchen is "squeaky clean" and we're cutting beef steak into cubes to make kabobs for the barbecue. We now know there are microbes "out to get us" on the knife, the cutting board, our hands, and perhaps the counter top. You rid ourselves of these microbes, we must sanitize the contaminated surfaces.

Sanitizing is a three-step process: We have to always make things squeaky clean again before sanitizing. So, **step one** is washing the counter top, cutting board, knife and our hands with warm soapy water before we sanitize. **Step two** is rinsing them to remove any soap or residue.

That little scratch on the cutting board appears to be only a tiny scratch to us - but for a pathogenic enemy, it's the Grand Canyon to hide in. Washing up with a detergent and water followed by a clean water rinse gets rid of the cover the cell can hide in.

Step three-the sanitizer-is terminating the cell. Several chemicals are available to sanitize work surfaces and utensils. You can use a solution of household chlorine bleach or iodine added to water to destroy microbes in the kitchen. Because it stains surfaces, iodine is not practical as household bleach.

A good rule of thumb is one ounce (30ml) of bleach in a gallon (4 L) of water. By the way, this is the common sanitizer used by professional food handlers and chefs. When used in this fashion, bleach is much less harmful to the environment and to us. In fact, it works like magic. Once a surface or utensil has been properly sanitized and dried, no chemical residue remains. It magically evaporates like water, leaving the item pathogen-free.

Personal Hygiene

The food handler has been found to be the source of contamination in the majority of foodborne illness cases. If you are the person cooking, then this means that you could be the source of contamination unless you pay close attention to your personal hygiene.

Because we touch food with our hands during preparation, hands can become the source of pathogen transmission. Microbes may come from our bodies, as with Staphylococcus bacteria, or they may be on our hands because of cross-contamination after handling raw foods such as chicken that contained Salmonella bacteria.

This is why it is recommended that, where possible, we use clean utensils rather than our hands when we prepare food. If we reduce hand contact, then we also reduce the chance of transmitting pathogens to the food.

Learning and practicing good personal hygiene is a very important step in the safe preparation of food. The simple practice of frequent hand washing before and during food preparation can significantly reduce the risk of contamination of the food.