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Summary

Eating outdoors at a picnic or barbecue is more relaxed and informal, but that does not mean you can let your guard down when it comes to food hygiene.

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A new report shows that nearly 100,000 pupils attend Dubai private schools that only meet 'minimal' standards. Are you happy with the education here?

- Somewhat happy. My children are doing as well as expected
- Not happy with the available education choices
- Not happy. But I can't afford to send my children to a better school
- Very happy. My children are excelling at school

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Ground rules: food safety still important at a barbecue

Michelle Gelok

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With only a month or so left before the summer heat drives us all indoors, many people are holding barbecues and family picnics to enjoy these last weeks of cooler weather. But as summer approaches and the temperature rises, so, unfortunately, will the number of cases of food-borne illness.

Also known as food poisoning, food-borne illness is caused by food contaminated with bacteria, parasites or viruses. Many countries see a spike in the number of cases of food-borne illness during the summer months when warmer temperatures combined with humidity provide an optimal environment for bacteria to thrive and multiply.

According to the World Health Organization, as many as 30 per cent of people living in industrialised countries suffer a bout of food poisoning each year.

Harmful bacteria, such as salmonella, *E coli* and campylobacter, are the most common culprits and can cause a range of symptoms including nausea, vomiting, diarrhoea, chills and fever. In severe cases, it can cause dehydration and even – albeit rarely – death. Pregnant women, children, the elderly and anyone with a compromised immune system are at a greater risk of developing food-borne illness from contaminated food.

While many people assume they are more likely to become ill after eating food prepared in restaurants, cafés or fast-food outlets, according to the UK's Food Standards Agency, you're just as likely to become ill from food you have prepared yourself. In fact, studies show that most kitchens contain more bacteria than anywhere else in the house. A recent international study that took samples from kitchens in seven countries, including the UK, India and Saudi Arabia, found that nearly half of the kitchen sinks and 90 per cent of the kitchen cloths examined contained harmful levels of bacteria that could cause illness.

Food-borne illness can be caused by food that is improperly stored, chilled, cooked or handled. Once introduced, bacteria can multiply and spread quickly, increasing the risk of illness. According to the Food Standards Agency, food poisoning at home can be largely prevented through proper food handling practices, as well as using a food thermometer to ensure food is cooked properly.

Think you know what it takes to prepare food properly and lower your risk of illness? Try this quiz to gauge your summer food safety know-how.

True or false?

1. If food tastes OK, it's safe to eat

False Unfortunately you can't always tell when food has spoiled by tasting it, smelling it or looking at it. Bacteria and viruses that can cause illness are not visible to the naked eye and may not always alter the taste of food. Proper food-handling, including keeping foods refrigerated and cooking food to a safe internal temperature, is paramount in reducing the risk.

2. The best place to store raw meat and poultry is on the bottom shelf of the fridge

True Raw meat and poultry should always be stored in clean, sealed containers on the bottom shelf of the fridge, so they don't drip raw juices on to fresh fruit, vegetables or cooked food. To ensure foods stay fresh and don't spoil, keep your fridge below 4°C and your freezer below -18°C. When grocery shopping, wrap meat, fish, poultry and eggs in plastic bags before placing them in your trolley to avoid cross-contamination with other fresh foods. Better yet, pack perishables in a cooler bag to keep them separate and cool until you get home.

3. Food poisoning is caused by the most recent meal eaten

False While some bacteria can cause symptoms of illness to appear almost immediately, other bacteria including *E coli*, can cause symptoms to appear up to three days after consuming contaminated food, according to the US Food and Drug Administration (FDA).

4. You can tell when burgers are cooked by looking at them.

False Despite what many people think, you cannot always tell when meat patties are cooked simply by looking. The only reliable way to ensure they are cooked and harmful bacteria killed is to use a food thermometer and ensure they reach an internal temperature of at least 71°C. Meat patties and other products prepared with ground beef or ground lamb, such as sausages and kofta, carry a greater risk of food-borne illness than steak or roasts, and must be cooked to a higher temperature. That's because bacteria that may be present on the surface of a whole piece of meat, such as steak, is killed by heat from cooking, whereas any surface bacteria end up being dispersed throughout a patty or sausage when the meat is ground or minced. According to Health Canada, steak and fish should be cooked to at least 63°C, whole chicken to at least 85°C, and chicken breasts and legs to at least 74°C. [Next page](#)

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