

Small errors, fatal consequences: Why kitchen hygiene is not only important in canteens and restaurants but also at home

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In Germany, every year more than 100,000 cases of illness are statistically recorded whose pathogen can be transferred via food. These reported cases are only the tip of the iceberg, however, as the actual number is estimated to be well over a million. The majority of infections are probably caused by food and for this reason, the proper handling of food in communal catering facilities and restaurants as well as at home is of high importance for avoiding food-borne infections. It is not only about relatively minor gastrointestinal illnesses like self-limiting diarrhoea. In particular among persons from risk groups (small children, expectant mothers, very old people or people whose immune system has been weakened by previous illness), a food-borne infection can also be severe, cause lasting damage and even prove fatal under certain circumstances. The improvement of kitchen hygiene is therefore a matter of vital importance for the German Federal Institute for Risk Assessment (BfR).

To be able to constantly reduce the number of food-borne infections, information is required on the foods involved in food-borne outbreaks¹ and on their production and treatment. That is why the Member States of the EU submit data on food-borne outbreaks every year to the European Food Safety Authority (EFSA). The EFSA report on zoonoses and food-borne outbreaks in Europe in 2016 shows that the majority of the 521 strong-evidence outbreaks was caused by the consumption of food in private households (205 outbreaks), followed by outbreaks caused by the consumption of food in restaurants, etc. (133) and communal catering facilities, such as canteens in kindergartens and schools, nursing homes and hospitals (87)¹. Improper handling of food can favour the outbreak of disease. According to the outbreak investigations, the major sources are meat and meat products and in particular poultry meat (126 outbreaks), as well as mixed food and buffet meals (85 outbreaks), eggs and egg products (72 outbreaks), fish and fisheries (70 outbreaks) and milk and milk products (45 outbreaks). Although vegetables, fruits, cereals, sprouted seeds, herbs and spices and their products made a much less significant contribution to the outbreak situation in Europe with a total of 34 outbreaks, they should in no way be ignored.

However, the 14,504 cases of food-borne disease in strong-evidence outbreaks recorded in Europe only partly reflect the food-borne infection situation in Germany and the EU. Above all, salmonella was the dominating causative agent of strong-evidence outbreaks reported by the EU Member States, whereas outbreaks caused by *Campylobacter*, *Listeria monocytogenes* and other food-borne pathogens are in the minority. However, regarding the individual cases of disease caused by food-borne pathogens that were reported to the public health authorities in Germany (approx. 100,000) and the European Union (approx. 360,000) in 2016, a completely different picture results: *Campylobacter* was the main cause of the reported cases of illness in Germany (approx. 74,000 cases) as well as in the EU (approx. 250,000 cases).

The risk of food-borne infections can be minimised through consistent compliance with the rules of good kitchen hygiene in both the professional area as well as in private households.

¹ A food-borne outbreak means an incidence of two or more human cases of the same disease, or a situation in which the observed number of cases exceeds the expected number and where the cases are linked, or are probably linked, to the same food source."

The BfR has published leaflets on this with general tips for avoiding food-borne infections in private households as well as information on individual pathogens. These are supplemented by flyers for professional applications available in several languages.

More information on the subject of food infections at the BfR website

Information on Hygiene rules in the Catering Sector

<http://www.bfr.bund.de/cm/350/hygieneregeln-in-der-gemeinschaftsgastronomie-englisch.pdf>

Press release: Pathogens in food: Improvements required to protect against Campylobacter, EHEC and Listeria 10/2015, 07/04/2015

http://www.bfr.bund.de/en/press_information/2015/10/pathogens_in_food_improvements_required_to_protect_against_campylobacter_ehec_and_listeria-193815.html



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The German Federal Institute for Risk Assessment (BfR) is a scientifically independent institution within the portfolio of the Federal Ministry of Food and Agriculture (BMEL) in Germany. It advises the Federal Government and Federal Laender on questions of food, chemical and product safety. The BfR conducts its own research on topics that are closely linked to its assessment tasks.

This text version is a translation of the original German text which is the only legally binding version.