

Young people have poor knowledge of food hygiene

June 16 2017, by Linda Koffmar

Annual cases of food poisoning are estimated at over 500,000, at a societal cost of over SEK 1 billion. Handling food properly is an issue of knowledge and in a new study from Uppsala University, Marie Lange, doctoral student in food science, demonstrates that young people have poor awareness of food hygiene. For example, one in five ninth graders did not know that chicken must always be cooked through.

Food poisoning can lead to serious consequences for the individual, such as secondary diseases and in the worst case, even death. The media has recently been covering the large number of people affected by diseases linked to *Campylobacter*. There is currently a movement towards transferring responsibility for preventing food poisoning from producers to consumers, which places demands on consumer knowledge and behaviour.

Inadequate knowledge

In her new dissertation, Marie Lange demonstrates inadequate hygiene awareness among young consumers. In a study carried out among ninth-grade students, one in five students did not know that chicken must always be cooked through. Almost half of the students thought it was okay to taste raw ground beef, even though ten years ago the Swedish National Food Agency published information about the fact that even a taste of contaminated ground beef could be dangerous and poses the risk of contracting EHEC. Almost half of the students also thought that +8

degrees Celsius was a sufficient refrigeration temperature, which is four degrees warmer than the recommended +4 degrees Celsius.

Students also lacked awareness of the importance of hand-washing and avoiding cross-contamination (where bacteria from one type of food is transferred to another), both of which are among the most common ways to avoid food poisoning. The study shows that boys, especially those who rarely or never cook food at home, run a higher risk of contracting severe [food poisoning](#).

Better education required

"The findings of the dissertation show that young [consumers](#) need better hygiene education, and that teaching in the primary school subject of home and consumer studies must emphasise food hygiene more clearly, and thus become more connected to students' daily lives," says Marie Lange, [doctoral student](#) at the Department of Food, Nutrition and Dietetics at Uppsala University.

For example, many students heat [food](#) daily, often in the microwave, but heating is a risk area that is often missing from school lessons, because the prepared meal is traditionally eaten during class.

Teaching in home and consumer studies needs to be better at addressing issues related to daily practices connected to risk, such as hand-washing, cross contamination, heating and refrigeration in order to increase students' opportunities for learning. Teachers need to be more reflective and stay up to date on information, while the responsible agencies must be clearer in their communication and offer schools updated information and teaching materials, according to Marie Lange.

More information: Food Safety Learning in Home and Consumer Studies: Teachers' and Students' Perspectives.

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Provided by Uppsala University

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