

# Foodborne illnesses are underestimated by young people

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Researchers from SafeConsume conducted a study in four European countries (Portugal, France, England, Hungary) interviewing 156 11- to 18-year olds about their food hygiene education, attitudes towards

foodborne illness and their existing food safety behaviors. Although students seemed to have good knowledge of personal hygiene rules such as handwashing, they were not clear about risks, causes or consequences relating to foodborne illness. Students in Hungary, England and Portugal even believed foodborne illness was expected, and for some, an acceptable part of life. Many of those who experienced illness associated this with food eaten outside of the home, however, food cooked at home is not intrinsically safer, and anecdotal experiences of becoming ill after eating food from outside the home may not always be accurate as incubation periods from foodborne pathogens vary.

Across all countries, family environment had the greatest influence on the skills, knowledge and behavior of the students and was a major factor in whether they followed hygiene practices; one student in England stated: "Yeah, I'd rinse it off [raw chicken] before I chop it . . . because my mum told me to." These findings suggest that poor hygiene behaviors can be perpetuated due to generational transfer of skills.

The fact that many [students](#) interviewed only had practical experience in their own kitchens at home may contextualize these results, schools in France and Portugal offer kitchen space only in vocational schools, in contrast to schools in England and Hungary. Students in England were also more likely than any other country to take up [work experience](#) in a kitchen, which was found to result in strict adherence to food safety behavior, although generally more so at work than at home.

The research aimed to make recommendations to help the development of educational resources to address existing issues regarding food hygiene in a format that would be engaging to young people. Results suggest these groups are accessing cooking resources largely online, and resources that bridge the gap between education and domestic and [social situations](#) could be beneficial for driving practical development of better food safety behaviors. This should come alongside development of

engaging educational resources, although for optimum uptake in educational settings food hygiene should be embedded further into the national curriculum.

**More information:** Rowshonara Syeda et al, Young People's Views on Food Hygiene and Food Safety: A Multicentre Qualitative Study, *Education Sciences* (2021). [DOI: 10.3390/educsci11060261](https://doi.org/10.3390/educsci11060261)

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