

**Are you smart about food safety?**  
(from the UC Berkeley Wellness Letter, June 2001)

Some 80 million people in the U.S. and Canada get sick every year from eating contaminated food -- though, in fact, this is only a guess, since most cases go unreported. For most of us, food poisoning means a day or two of vomiting and/or diarrhea. Yet many people get seriously ill from it, and an estimated 5,000 die every year.

There's a lot you can do to protect yourself and your family. Test your safety savvy with the quiz below. Some questions have more than one right answer.

1. Half of all cases of food poisoning could be prevented if
  - (a) people handling and preparing food washed their hands thoroughly before doing so,
  - (b) more antibacterial soaps were used in kitchens, or
  - (c) meats were irradiated before being packaged.
  
2. A cold temperature is one good way to keep bacteria from multiplying. Your refrigerator temperature should be kept at or below
  - (a) 40°F. (4°C),
  - (b) 32°F. (0°C), or
  - (c) 50°F. (10°C).
  
3. The ideal temperature for a home freezer is
  - (a) 32°F. (0°C),
  - (b) 0°F. (-18°C), or
  - (c) 17°F. (-8°C).
  
4. No cooked food should sit at room temperature for more than
  - (a) 3 hours,
  - (b) 2 hours, or
  - (c) 1 hour.
  
5. Pick the most important tools for food safety from this list:
  - (a) a meat thermometer,
  - (b) soap, hot water, clean surfaces, clean sponges and/or cloths,
  - (c) refrigerator thermometer,
  - (d) a sponge impregnated with a disinfectant,
  - (e) detergent rinses for raw vegetables,
  - (f) paper towels.
  
6. True or false: Organic foods must be handled as carefully as conventional ones.
  
7. Food poisoning is the most commonly caused by
  - (a) home cooking,
  - (b) meat, fish, eggs, and other animal products, or
  - (c) restaurant meals.
  
8. True or false: Greens labeled "prewashed" or "triple washed" don't need further washing.
  
9. Storing raw meats and fish separately from vegetables and dairy products in the refrigerator is
  - (a) essential or
  - (b) unnecessary.
  
10. Which cutting board is safer:
  - (a) plastic or
  - (b) wooden?

11. The advantage of a free-range chicken is that
- (a) it is less likely to be contaminated with salmonella,
  - (b) some people think it tastes better, or
  - (c) it is more nutritious.
12. Which of the following need to be kept cold on a picnic?
- (a) Bread,
  - (b) peanut butter,
  - (c) hard-boiled eggs,
  - (d) fresh fruit,
  - (e) jams and jellies,
  - (f) precooked meats,
  - (g) pickles, or
  - (h) mustard.
13. That leftover casserole smells okay, but it's been in the fridge for five days. You could
- (a) heat it thoroughly and eat it with no worries, or
  - (b) throw it away.
14. You marinated the raw salmon before grilling it, and you would like to use the marinade for a sauce. You'll be safe if you
- (a) pour the cold marinade on the cooked fish, or
  - (b) bring the marinade to a boil before serving.
15. You're taking a chance if you eat raw or runny eggs. Which products are most likely to contain raw eggs?
- (a) Homemade ice cream,
  - (b) custards and flans,
  - (c) eggnog, or
  - (d) Caesar salads.
16. When you bring home eggs, you should
- (a) arrange them in the rack on the door of the fridge,
  - (b) wash them,
  - (c) throw out any that are cracked, or
  - (d) store them in the carton on a cold shelf.
17. True or False: Raw milk products are better for you.
18. True or False: If a product is past its "sell-date," it may still be okay. Past its "use by" date, it should probably be tossed.
19. True or False: Apple cider has natural preservatives, and it's okay to buy it straight from a country mill.

## Answers

1. (a) If we all -- food service workers, home cooks, and eaters -- washed our hands more thoroughly and frequently, we'd get sick less often. Plain soap will do -- antibacterial products are not needed. Hot water feels best and washes away the soap faster, but cold water is okay, too.
2. (a)
3. (b)
4. (b) But if you are picnicking and the weather is hot, reduce that to 1 hour.

5. (a, b, c, and f) Paper towels are useful for wiping up meat juices. Another tip: Don't use the dish towel as a hand towel -- your hands may have bacteria on them if you have handled raw meat or fish. Disinfectant sponges and other antibacterial products, including vegetable rinses, provide little or no advantage in the kitchen.
6. True. Bacteria, unfortunately, are very organic.
7. (b) wherever they are cooked
8. True. Vegetables and greens washed at the processing plant and labeled as such are probably cleaner than home-washed greens can ever be. They do deteriorate quickly, so pick through the greens and discard any wilted ones. Other greens, not labeled as having been washed, including mesclun from bins should be thoroughly washed in cold water.
9. (a) Raw juices from meat, poultry, or fish can contaminate foods that you don't intend to cook.
10. Either one is fine, as long as you scrub it with soap and water after cutting raw meat, poultry, or fish on it. The one advantage of plastic is that you can sanitize it in the dishwasher.
11. (b) No matter how a chicken was raised or how much or how little it costs, it must be handled properly and cooked thoroughly.
12. (c and f) They should be chilled before packing and carried to the picnic in a cooler.
13. (b) The sniff test is not reliable. Foods cut in small pieces, as in a casserole, spoil more easily.
14. (b) And be sure to transfer the fish and marinade to a clean platter, not the unwashed dish in which it was marinated.
15. (a, c, and d) Custards and flans are cooked, presumably, to an internal temperature of at least 160°F.(71°C.). Eggnog, Caesar salads, and homemade ice cream will be okay if made with pasteurized raw egg products.
16. (c and d) If the eggs were properly processed, they should be clean. The door of the refrigerator is less cold.
17. False. Raw milk and its products are dangerous because they can contain a wide range of microorganisms. Make sure all dairy products you buy have been pasteurized.
18. True. However, if a product (for example, dry cereal) says "best if used by," it may still be safe -- though it might have deteriorated somewhat. Much depends on how a product was handled before you bought it. Milk past its sell date may still be fine if it's been kept very cold.
19. False. Buy only pasteurized cider and juices. There have been outbreaks of food poisoning from unpasteurized juices.