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A clean kitchen prevents hepatitis

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In addition to hand hygiene, it is important to clean and sanitise kitchen surfaces.
PICTURE CREDIT: TIRACHARD — FREEPIK

A clean kitchen prevents hepatitis

THE kitchen is considered the heart of any home or restaurant. But amid the aroma of freshly prepared meals, have you ever wondered about the hidden dangers that could lurk there?

Before your next meal, understand the connection between dirty kitchens and hepatitis. Whether dining out or preparing food at home, knowing these risks is vital for the health and well-being of you and your loved ones.

Hepatitis A and E are viral infections primarily transmitted via the faecal-oral route, often through contaminated food or water. Hepatitis A and E infections are usually short-term and do not lead to chronic illness.

Symptoms can range from mild to severe, and some individuals may be asymptomatic.

Common signs include fever, fatigue, loss of appetite, nausea, vomiting, abdominal pain, diarrhoea, jaundice, dark urine, pale stools and itchy skin," says Columbia Asia Hospital — Bintulu medical officer and

occupational health doctor Dr Tania Peter Jang.

While most people recover within weeks to months, in rare cases, hepatitis A and E can lead to acute liver failure. This risk is higher for older adults, pregnant women or those with pre-existing liver conditions.

"Hepatitis A and E viruses can contaminate food if hands are not properly washed after handling potentially contaminated items or coming into contact with faecal matter," says Dr Tania.

These viruses can persist on cutting boards, utensils, countertops, sinks and even in water for weeks.

Improper handwashing, failing to change gloves between tasks, and neglecting to clean hands after bathroom use can contribute to virus transmission.

CROSS-CONTAMINATION

Cross-contamination often occurs in kitchens where surfaces, utensils or hands are not thoroughly cleaned between tasks.

"Raw or undercooked foods, espe-

cially shellfish, fruits and vegetables, can carry hepatitis A and E if they come into contact with contaminated surfaces or utensils," adds Dr Tania.

Infected food handlers can also transmit the virus before showing symptoms, particularly if they fail to maintain proper hygiene or use gloves.

Poor water quality and pest infestations also heighten hepatitis risks.

"Pests, such as flies and rodents, drawn to unsanitary conditions, can spread the virus through droppings, contaminating food storage areas, water supplies and kitchen surfaces."

To ensure kitchen safety, inspect and seal entry points to prevent pests from entering. Do not overcrowd your refrigerator, as this can hinder airflow, says Dr Tania.

She recommends keeping raw and cooked foods separate to avoid cross-contamination.

FOOD HANDLING

Safe food handling begins with clean raw materials. Ensure drinking water is from a safe source, or boil and treat it if necessary.

"Cook food thoroughly, particularly shellfish and meat. For shellfish, boil



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Dr Tania Peter Jang

until the shells open and then for an additional three to five minutes.

"For meat, ensure juices run clear and no blood is visible."

Additionally, restrict anyone exhibiting symptoms of illness, such as diarrhoea or vomiting, from preparing or handling food.

Proper handwashing with soap and water is essential before and after handling food, after using the toilet, and between kitchen tasks.

"Regularly clean and sanitise sur-

COMMON FOOD PRONE TO HEPATITIS

- Shellfish
- Raw fruits and vegetables
- Drinks and ice made from a contaminated water supply
- Unpasteurised dairy products, such as milk and cheese
- Ready-to-eat food
- Food prepared with contaminated water as an ingredient, such as soups and stews

faces, utensils and equipment, particularly after preparing raw meat."

In addition to hand hygiene, it is important to clean and sanitise kitchen surfaces, utensils, and equipment regularly to eliminate potential contamination.

Ideally, this should be done with hot water and a cleansing agent, especially after preparing raw meat or handling potentially contaminated food.

Promptly removing food waste and keeping everything clean are key to preventing pests. Also, using gloves when handling ready-to-eat food is a good practice.

"Remember to change gloves regularly and wash your hands before putting on a new pair."

"It might seem like extra work, but it really makes a big difference," says Dr Tania.

Finally, using separate utensils for raw food and cooked or ready-to-eat food helps prevent cross-contamination.

Maintaining a clean kitchen isn't just about aesthetics — it's a key step in safeguarding your health.

By understanding the risks and adopting good hygiene practices, you can reduce the chances of hepatitis transmission in your home or workplace. meerafnst.com.my



Shellfish are among the food with a hepatitis risk. PICTURE CREDIT: FREEPIK



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SUMMARIES

THE kitchen is considered the heart of any home or restaurant. But amid the aroma of freshly prepared meals, have you ever wondered about the hidden dangers that could lurk there?Before your next meal, understand the connection between dirty kitchens and hepatitis. Whether dining out or preparing food at home, knowing these risks is vital for the health and well-being of you and your loved ones. Hepatitis A and E are viral infections primarily transmitted via the faecal-oral route, often through contaminated food or water. Hepatitis A and E infections are usually short-term and do not lead to chronic illness.