Food and Water Safety

People with a weakened immune system are immunocompromised and are more susceptible to serious food borne and water borne illnesses resulting in food poisoning. When your CD4 count is below 200, ensuring good standards of food and water safety is essential to reduce your risk of infections.

Water safety

Tap water

UK tap water is safe to drink when your HIV is controlled with antiretroviral drugs. If your CD4 count is below 200, you are advised to boil your drinking water. Boiling water is the safest way to kill the parasite Cryptosporidium, which can cause severe diarrhoea in those with a compromised immune system.

Boiled (then cooled) water can be stored in the fridge for up to 24 hours in a clean bottle or covered jug. This water is then safe for drinking, washing fruit and vegetables, brushing teeth and making ice cubes.

Bottled water

Bottled water does not go through the same testing as UK tap water, so it cannot be guaranteed that it is safe from bacteria and waterborne infections. Bacterial contamination has been found in commercially bottled spring water, probably where the water from mountain springs has been contaminated by grazing sheep. Whilst abroad, the safest option is to take a travel kettle and boil your water. If this is not possible, buy carbonated bottled water, as the acidity reduces bacterial growth.

Read the label on your bottled water to learn where the water comes from and how it has been treated to make it safe for drinking.

While there is currently no standardized label for bottled water, labels may tell you about the way the water is treated. Check the label for a toll-free number or web page address of the company that bottled the water to learn more.

Look for the following types of treatments for bottled water that protect against Cryptosporidium:

- Reverse osmosis
- Distillation
- Filtration with an absolute 1-micron filter

Water filters

‘Point of use’ water filters that remove all particles above 1 micron in size are an alternative to boiling. This filter will need to be fixed to your mains water supply, usually under the kitchen sink, and be changed at regular intervals. Jug filters are not adequate as they do not remove parasites and collect potentially harmful bacteria.

Food safety

Food storage

- Freeze fresh meat, poultry, fish, and shellfish that cannot be used in a few days.
- Thaw frozen meat, poultry, fish, and shellfish in the refrigerator, microwave, or cold water changed every 30 min. Cook foods immediately after thawing.

Food preparation

- Wash hands with warm soapy water and cover any cuts/wounds– this is also important for anyone preparing your meals.
- Wash cooking utensils, and countertops often when preparing foods.
- Wash the outside of all fruits and vegetables thoroughly, even if they need to be peeled before use.
- Make sure that raw foods are stored and prepared separately from cooked foods.
- Avoid using wooden chopping boards as they are difficult to clean. Use separate chopping boards for meat and veg.
- Ensure all food is well cooked and piping hot– including poultry, and ready meals. Do not eat raw or undercooked meat, poultry, fish, or shellfish (clams, oysters, scallops, and mussels). Whole poultry should be cooked to 82.2 degrees, poultry breast and well-done meats to 76.6 degrees, and medium-rare beefsteaks, roasts, veal, and lamb to 60 degrees.
- Reheat sauces, soups, marinades, and gravies to a boil. Reheat leftovers thoroughly to at least 74 degrees. Use a food thermometer to determine temperature. If a microwave oven is used, cover the container, and turn or stir the food to make sure it is heated evenly throughout.
- When cooking, keep hot foods hot (60 degrees or above) and cold foods cold (4 degrees or below.) Harmful bacteria can grow rapidly in the danger zone between these temperatures. Whether raw or cooked, never leave meat, poultry, eggs, fish, or shellfish out at room temperature for >2 h (1 h in weather 32.2 degrees or above). Chill leftovers as soon as possible. Use refrigerated leftovers within 3–4 days.
- Avoid food that is mouldy or has passed its sell by date, and eggs that have cracked.
- Avoid unpackaged cold meats and salads from deli counters, salad or sandwich bars.

Avoid	Safer Alternatives	Reason / Risk
Cheese with blue veins or mould ripened cheeses e.g. Stilton, Danish Blue, Cambert, Brie	Cheese without blue veins or mould rind e.g. cheddar, Cheshire, cream cheese, cottage cheese, mozzarella	Listeria
All types of Paté	Cold roast beef/ham	Listeria
Food containing raw eggs e.g. homemade desserts	Foods made with pasteurised eggs; Eggs with the British Lion stamp can be eaten raw	Salmonella
Uncooked meat / game	well cooked meat, game & poultry	Toxoplasmosis
Raw / farm unpasteurised goat's, sheep's & cow's milk and fruit juices	Pasteurised / UHT / homogenised milk, yoghurt and fruit juices	E-coli
Unwashed fruit & vegetables/lettuce	Washed fruit & vegetables that are soil free	Toxoplasmosis
Raw sea food e.g. oysters, sushi, shellfish	Cooked fish/shellfish	Campylobacter

Are there any other risks?

Cryptosporidium and Toxoplasmosis can also be caught by direct contact with human and animal faeces. Therefore, it is important to wash your hands after going to the toilet, changing a nappy, after handling pets, changing cat litter, and gardening. Avoid oral-anal sexual practices.

NOTES:

Disclaimer

Produced by Dietitians at Birmingham Heartlands Hospital
If you would like to discuss any issues around food and water hygiene, please make an appointment at reception, Tel: 0121 424 3359

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