

Kitchen Life 2: What do people really do in their kitchens?

Every year in the UK, there are 2.4 million cases of foodborne illness, resulting in around 222,000 GP appointments ([footnote 1](#)). Now, [Kitchen Life 2](#), an award-winning piece of research commissioned by the Food Standards Agency, has given us insight into what really happens behind closed doors and how our behaviours could be making us sick.

Using motion-sensitive cameras, interviews, and fridge thermometers to explore food hygiene in household and business kitchens, the study observed 101 kitchens. Its findings have helped us understand the extent of risky food safety behaviours of both consumers and food businesses.

The research shows that almost half of the time, householders who took part only rinsed their hands with water, and did not use soap, when preparing meat, fish or poultry, thus exposing themselves to potential foodborne illness. The study also found that over half of households who installed a thermometer in their fridge had an average temperature higher than the recommended maximum of 5°C, risking the growth of harmful bacteria.

Kitchen Life 2 has shown us that there are many factors that impact behaviour in the kitchen, from the physical space available, to people's understanding of food hygiene and beliefs around its consequences. We now know that behaviour in the kitchen is not always the result of conscious thought; instead, people develop different habits and routines that can help or hinder food safety. For example, good handwashing routines help to prevent foodborne illness, but bad habits like wiping hands on a tea towel instead of handwashing increase the risk of spreading disease. Ease and convenience also have a strong influence on behaviour. When participants were tired and distracted, or when food businesses had busy periods of service, food safety was more likely to be compromised.

Kitchen Life 2 has given us real insights into the food safety practices that people use in their kitchens every day. In particular, it demonstrates that awareness of food safety isn't enough – in many cases, participants knew what they should be doing to keep food safe, but factors like speed or ease of use led them to behave in a more risky fashion.

Although people often think of foodborne disease as a mild illness, the reality is very different. With so many people having to visit their doctor each year because of foodborne disease, this research is a reminder of how important good hygiene and food safety practices are in preventing illness. We encourage everyone to protect themselves and others by washing their hands during food preparation, washing tea-towels regularly and limiting cross-contamination between cooked and raw foods.

Robin May, Chief Scientific Advisor of the Food Standards Agency

The new knowledge gained from Kitchen Life 2 will inform the FSA's future policy, helping us to improve guidance to businesses and consumers, with the aim of lowering the number of foodborne disease cases.

The FSA regularly runs food safety advice across social media channels and consumers can find more [tips and guidance to stay safe in the kitchen](#).

1. [The Burden of Foodborne Disease in the UK 2018 | Food Standards Agency](#)