

Flatmates, fridges and food safety: The Food Standards Agency's guide for students in the kitchen

Student life is a fun and exciting time for young adults, but it often presents unique food safety hurdles that can put health at risk. Driven by financial pressures, [research](#) shows that more than one in three students access food from bins or waste areas of supermarkets and shops, whilst nearly half experience food insecurity - significantly higher than the national average of 18% for adults. These pressures, combined with living conditions where students typically have just one fridge shelf each, make it even more crucial to follow proper food safety practices.

The challenges are particularly pronounced for students in some regions, where food insecurity can affect up to 60% of the student population. Around two-thirds (65%) of students have reported that their fridge contained food past the use-by-date. Many also find it difficult to maintain cleanliness in shared kitchens.

This advice is particularly timely as recent UK Health Security Agency (UKHSA) data shows foodborne illness is on the rise. In 2024, Shiga toxin-producing *Escherichia coli* (STEC) infections increased by 26% in England, and *Campylobacter* and *Salmonella* cases are also at their highest rate in a decade. In Northern Ireland, food poisoning continues to be a significant issue with The Public Health Agency reporting 2,724 cases in 2024, whilst Public Health Wales reported 5,374 cases of *Campylobacter* in Wales in 2024.

These infections can cause serious illness, and young adults living away from home in shared accommodation, who may also be cooking and preparing food for the first time, may be at risk if food safety practices are compromised.

Moving away from home into shared accommodation comes with new food safety challenges that can sometimes feel outside of your control, from tight budgets to limited storage space. But there are simple steps that can help keep you and your housemates safe.

Keep your shared fridge between 0-5°C, store ready-to-eat food away from raw meat and check use-by dates regularly. Wash shared sponges and cloths frequently and always wash your hands with soap and water before and after touching your phone while cooking to avoid cross-contamination.

Cook food properly and according to the packaging instructions. When reheating leftovers, make sure food is steaming hot throughout, rather than warmed, as the high temperature will kill any bacteria that may be present.

More tips can be found on the FSA's dedicated [student guide to food hygiene safety](#) page, as part of a campaign focused on food hygiene in the kitchen.

Narriman Looch, Head of Foodborne Disease Control at the FSA

Starting university and living away from home is an exciting milestone, but it can also bring new food safety challenges. Taking simple steps can reduce the risk of getting foodborne infections. Storing and cooking food properly, avoiding cross-contamination, which happens when bacteria pass from raw foods to ready-to-eat foods, and washing hands thoroughly with soap and water, especially after using the toilet or handling raw meat, can all help prevent infections.

“If you do experience mild food poisoning, make sure you stay hydrated. If symptoms are more severe, such as continuous fever, severe dehydration, or diarrhoea lasting more than 72 hours, seek medical advice. Anyone with diarrhoea or vomiting should avoid preparing food for others until they have recovered and have been symptom-free for at least 24 hours. By taking these precautions, students can protect themselves and their friends while making the most of their university experience.

Dr Gauri Godbole, Deputy Director, Gastrointestinal Infections at UKHSA