

Hepatitis E

What you can do to reduce the risk of becoming ill due to Hepatitis E

What is Hepatitis E?

Hepatitis E is an infection caused by the hepatitis E virus (also known as HEV). Both humans and animals can be infected by HEV.

People who are most likely to suffer severe symptoms are young children, pregnant women, people with an underlying health condition (e.g. cancer, diabetes, liver and kidney disease) and older people. ?

You can find information on the symptoms of Hepatitis E and how it makes you ill on the [NHS Hepatitis page](#) or on the [UKHSA Hepatitis E page](#)

Video: FSA explains hepatitis E

How you can contract Hepatitis E

In the UK, Hepatitis E has been associated with eating undercooked meat especially pork and pork products.

It is also important to be aware that HEV can be widespread in areas with poor sanitation. When travelling to parts of the world with poor sanitation, you can reduce your risk of HEV infection by taking precautions including good food and water hygiene measures.

How you can reduce the risk of Hepatitis E at home

We particularly advise that all whole cuts of pork, pork products (e.g. bacon, sausages) and pork liver should be [thoroughly cooked](#) until:

- they're steaming hot all the way through
- none of the meat is pink when you cut into the thickest part
- any juices run clear

To reduce the risk of Hepatitis E, it's important to:?

- [cook food correctly](#)??by following the guidance on time and temperature
- [wash your hands](#) regularly with soap and water before, during and after meal preparation??
- [avoid cross-contamination](#) which might lead to bacteria passing from raw foods to foods that are ready to eat via things like reusable shopping bags, knives, dirty surfaces and chopping boards

- [chill your food](#)??below 5°C - this will stop or significantly slow the growth of bacteria
- make sure that food preparation areas are [clean](#) to prevent harmful bacteria from spreading.

FSA Explains

Viruses are very small and often highly contagious pathogenic agents which cause disease.

Foodborne viruses account for an estimated 18% of the UK's food poisoning incidents – a significant proportion.

Viruses can be spread between people (hosts) in different ways such as through bodily fluids, the gastrointestinal tract and through the air.

Viruses rely on the cellular machinery of hosts (living organisms) to multiply. Some viruses can survive and remain infectious in foods and the environment for prolonged periods of time. Some viruses can survive harsh conditions such as:

- high temperatures
- low temperatures
- acidic or alkaline environments
- UV exposure

What the FSA is doing to keep you safe from hepatitis E

Until recently, people in the UK only usually became infected with hepatitis E if they'd travelled abroad to places with poor sanitation.

We now know that there are more people, particularly immunosuppressed patients, with hepatitis E who haven't travelled abroad. We suspect that these cases may be due to exposure to infectious hepatitis E virus in pork and pork products.

While it's possible to identify the hepatitis E virus in food, we can't tell whether it's infectious and capable of making us ill. We're continuing to research how foodborne hepatitis E virus may be affecting UK consumers.

A key area we need more evidence for is the development of improved detection methods. This is so that we can better assess the risk from hepatitis E virus in the food chain. We'll then be able to take steps to reduce the chances of it reaching our dinner plates.

We know that thorough cooking kills bacteria and viruses, but we're not certain how effective different cooking practices are at eliminating viruses such as hepatitis E from food.

We're planning further work to understand how much heat is required and for how long in order to remove hepatitis E in food. This will enable us to give clear advice on what temperature foods should be cooked at and for how long. This applies in particular to pork and pork products.