

Know Your High-risk Foods

A series on high-risk foods

Choose safe. Eat safe.
Give your baby the healthiest start in life.



Food Safety Advice for Pregnant Women

Anyone can get foodborne illnesses, also known as food poisoning. However, pregnant women are more susceptible to food poisoning because their immune systems change during pregnancy and their unborn babies' immune systems are still in development, which can increase the risk of premature delivery or miscarriage.

Raw or Undercooked Foods are High-risk Foods

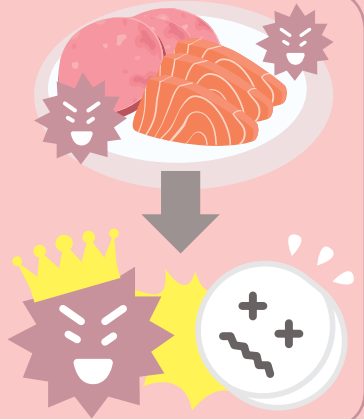
Food Poisoning

Raw or undercooked foods are high-risk foods, as there is no or inadequate heat treatment to eliminate the microorganisms present, such as bacteria, viruses and parasites, that can pose risks to health. Common symptoms of food poisoning caused by eating food contaminated by microorganisms include vomiting, diarrhoea, abdominal pain and fever.



Superbugs

Raw or undercooked foods are also associated with the risk of 'superbugs'. They are microorganisms that have developed antimicrobial resistance (AMR) to stop a wide range of antimicrobial agents, antibiotics for example, from working against them. AMR is a serious public health threat. While cooking can kill 'superbugs', raw or undercooked foods are more likely to carry microorganisms including 'superbugs' that can be transferred to humans through food intake. Whether or not 'superbugs' can cause illnesses, they may transfer their antibiotic resistance genes to other bacteria inside the human body, therefore affecting the effectiveness of future use of antibiotics when needed.



Listeriosis and Pregnancy

Other than raw or undercooked foods, pregnant women should also avoid cold ready-to-eat foods (e.g. sandwiches with cold cuts, soft ice-cream and pre-cut fruits) because they could be contaminated by listeria bacteria commonly found in nature and in some foods. You can get listeriosis from eating foods contaminated by listeria bacteria. Although listeriosis is not common in Hong Kong and causes mild symptoms in healthy people, it can be very dangerous for pregnant women. Infected pregnant women may transmit the listeria bacteria to their foetuses, thus leading to **miscarriages, stillbirths, premature births or serious illnesses in a newborn baby.**



Avoid Raw or Undercooked Foods and Choose Safer Alternatives

Let's learn about the foods to avoid and safer alternatives for pregnant women:

Foods to Avoid

Safer Alternatives

Seafood



Fish served raw/ undercooked

(e.g. sushi, sashimi, smoked salmon)

Thoroughly cooked fish;
smoked fish and precooked fish reheated thoroughly;
canned fish



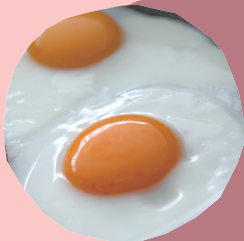
All other raw/ undercooked seafood

(e.g. oysters, scallops, shrimps, cuttlefish)

Thoroughly cooked seafood;
smoked seafood and precooked seafood reheated thoroughly;
canned seafood



Eggs



Eggs served raw or undercooked

(unhardened whites and yolks, e.g. sunny-side-up eggs, scrambled eggs)

Fully cooked eggs



Salad and sandwich dressings or desserts made with raw eggs

(e.g. Caesar dressing, mayonnaise, tiramisu)

Salad and sandwich dressings or desserts containing no raw eggs or made with pasteurised eggs





Meat



Raw/ undercooked meat and offal

(e.g. congees served with undercooked minced beef/pork liver, partially cooked steak)

Thoroughly cooked meat and offal



Cold meat and meat products

(e.g. ham, sausages, pate)

Cold meat and meat products reheated thoroughly



Dairy products



Soft cheeses (e.g. Feta, Brie, Camembert) and blue cheeses (e.g. Danish blue, Gorgonzola and Roquefort) made from raw milk

Cheeses made from pasteurised milk



Vegetables



Ready-to-eat raw vegetables

(e.g. prepackaged salad vegetables, seed sprouts, raw greens in sandwiches)

Thoroughly washed and cooked fresh vegetables



5 Keys to Preventing Food Poisoning

Pregnant women should always follow the 5 keys below to reduce the risk of food poisoning:



Choose

Choose fresh and wholesome materials



Clean

Keep hands and utensils clean



Separate

Separate raw and cooked foods



Safe Temperature

Keep food at a safe temperature



Cook

Cook thoroughly

When Eating Out

- Order food that is properly cooked. If in doubt, ask your server about the ingredients of the dishes and how they are cooked.
- If a restaurant serves you undercooked food, send it back to be thoroughly cooked until it is safe to eat.
- Handle your leftovers quickly. Refrigerate them within 2 hours of eating out. When reheating leftovers, make sure the core temperature of food reaches at least 75°C before eating.

