

Factsheet: People who are at higher risk of food poisoning

Anyone can get food poisoning. However, some people are more likely to become very unwell from it.

People in the following groups are more likely to become ill and have severe symptoms from food poisoning.

Age or life stage:

- Young children, typically children under 5 years old, as the immune system is still developing.
- Pregnancy, as the immune system changes during the development of the unborn child.
- Older adults, typically people aged 65 and older, as the immune system starts to weaken around this age.

People with underlying health conditions:

- Some health conditions such as cancer, diabetes, HIV, liver disease, or kidney disease, can impact the body's ability to fight infection, including food poisoning.

People taking certain medications or treatments:

- Chemotherapy can weaken the immune system.
- Medicines that lower the immune system (immunosuppressants), such as those taken for autoimmune conditions or after an organ transplant.
- Prescribed medicines that reduce stomach acid, such as proton pump inhibitors (PPIs) like omeprazole.

If someone fits into more than one of these groups, such as being older and having diabetes, the risk of getting very sick from food poisoning is higher.

How to avoid food poisoning

Good food safety practices are important for everyone, but it's especially important to understand the risks if you're in a higher-risk group. There are some simple food safety steps you can take to stay safe:

- Wash your hands and surfaces before preparing food and after handling raw meat or poultry.
- Make sure your fridge temperature is between 0°C and 5°C.
- Cook food thoroughly until it's steaming hot.
- Never wash raw meat or poultry.
- Keep raw food and ready-to-eat food separate.
- Always follow use-by dates.

Visit the [Food Standards Scotland website](#) for more information and food safety advice for higher-risk groups.