

A SURVEY OF DOMESTIC FOOD HANDLING PRACTICES

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Background: Food poisoning (also known as food borne illness or food borne disease) is any illness that results from eating contaminated food. The most common bacterial agents of these illnesses are *E. coli*, *Campylobacter*, *Salmonella*, *Shigella* and *Listeria*. Other causes include viruses, parasites, toxins and contaminants (CDC, 2005). Contamination of food occurs primarily because of improper handling, cooking and storage.

Objective: To assess the level of consumer knowledge regarding safe food handling practices, and the incidence of food poisoning within the chosen sample population.

Design: A sample of 138 adult persons (age 18 or older) was chosen by using systematic sampling within households of the Realspring Gardens community during the month of March 2010. A 25 item questionnaire was administered to the participants, which included sections on Cleaning and Sanitation, Food Practices, Food Poisoning and Demographics. The data obtained was analysed using SPSS version 16 software.

Results: While indicators such as hand washing, use of soap and washing of produce had very high rates of good practice, other areas such as thawing of foods, use of cutting boards, storage of meat showed that proper food safety practices were not observed by several members of the sample. Almost half the sample had an episode of food poisoning, but did not believe this was the result of consuming food prepared at home, and thought that street vendors were the most likely source of acquiring a food borne illness.

Conclusion: Consumers in this sample were generally unaccepting of the view that food poisoning may result from home cooked food. Some unsafe food handling practices were standard in this population, and may indicate a knowledge deficit in this area.

