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Release: New USDA Study on Consumer Kitchen Behavior Underscores the Importance of Food Safety Education Month

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**New USDA Study on Consumer Kitchen Behavior Underscores the Importance of**

**Food Safety Education Month**

*Lack of Handwashing Continues to be a Concern*

**WASHINGTON, Sept. 19, 2023** – The U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) is releasing during Food Safety Education Month the results from the final year of a five-year study that observed how consumers prepared meals. The study was produced by USDA’s Food Safety and Inspection Service (FSIS) as part of their efforts to highlight the importance of safe food handling practices.

“These studies are important for USDA to understand consumer behaviors in the kitchen and it is timely to be releasing the latest findings during Food Safety Education Month,” said USDA Under Secretary for Food Safety Dr. Emilio Esteban. “The results allow us to shape food safety communications and help consumers safely prepare food.”

The [study observed food safety behaviors](https://www.fsis.usda.gov/food-safety/food-safety-stats/consumer-research), including participants’ thermometer use for ground pork sausage, handwashing, and cleaning and sanitizing of food preparation surfaces.

**Handwashing**

As seen in the previous four years of the study, thorough handwashing remains a concern. The most recent data shows that 87% of participants self-reported they washed their hands before starting to cook in the test kitchen. However, only 44% of participants were observed doing so before meal preparation. Additionally, handwashing was not attempted 83% of the time when it should have been done (e.g., touching raw sausage and unwashed cantaloupe, cracking eggs, contaminated equipment or surfaces). Throughout the study, 96% of handwashing attempts did not contain all necessary steps.

**Thermometer Use**

In the study, 50% of participants used a food thermometer to check the doneness of the sausage patties. However, 50% of those participants did not check all the patties with a food thermometer. It is important to check all pieces of food being cooked to ensure all have reached a safe internal temperature. Thickness and size of a food item can cause it to cook to different temperatures.

**Cross-Contamination**

The study used a harmless tracer bacteria, which was injected into the pork sausage, to simulate the spread of foodborne illness-causing bacteria during meal preparation. Among the surfaces tested, the kitchen sink was most often contaminated, with 34% of participants contaminating the sink during meal preparation. The next highest was the cantaloupe, with 26% of participants introducing contamination when cutting the cantaloupe during meal preparation. Contamination on fruits and vegetables, and other ready-to-eat foods, is especially concerning because these foods are consumed raw, without a final step like cooking, which kill bacteria.

For more food safety information, call the USDA Meat and Poultry Hotline at 1-888-MPHotline (1-888-674-6854), email [MPHotline@usda.gov](mailto:MPHotline@usda.gov) or chat live at [ask.usda.gov](https://gcc02.safelinks.protection.outlook.com/?url=https%3A%2F%2Fask.usda.gov%2Fs%2F&data=04%7C01%7C%7C5e261632ab2d4d4af52608d9e28668a9%7Ced5b36e701ee4ebc867ee03cfa0d4697%7C0%7C0%7C637789889172321557%7CUnknown%7CTWFpbGZsb3d8eyJWIjoiMC4wLjAwMDAiLCJQIjoiV2luMzIiLCJBTiI6Ik1haWwiLCJXVCI6Mn0%3D%7C3000&sdata=z8opm%2Bu4zcovV8zRYnb2bPv5OY90bFAWEx5scPtQMqQ%3D&reserved=0) from 10 a.m. to 6 p.m. Eastern Time, Monday through Friday.

Access news releases and other information at USDA’s Food Safety and Inspection Service’s (FSIS) website at [www.fsis.usda.gov/newsroom](https://gcc02.safelinks.protection.outlook.com/?url=http%3A%2F%2Fwww.fsis.usda.gov%2Fnewsroom&data=04%7C01%7C%7C5e261632ab2d4d4af52608d9e28668a9%7Ced5b36e701ee4ebc867ee03cfa0d4697%7C0%7C0%7C637789889172321557%7CUnknown%7CTWFpbGZsb3d8eyJWIjoiMC4wLjAwMDAiLCJQIjoiV2luMzIiLCJBTiI6Ik1haWwiLCJXVCI6Mn0%3D%7C3000&sdata=0l3rEdwVAm8IgmU9Ujz9wEiPLplFhWhaouSMrgB3BWk%3D&reserved=0). Follow FSIS on Twitter at [twitter.com/usdafoodsafety](https://gcc02.safelinks.protection.outlook.com/?url=http%3A%2F%2Ftwitter.com%2Fusdafoodsafety&data=04%7C01%7C%7C5e261632ab2d4d4af52608d9e28668a9%7Ced5b36e701ee4ebc867ee03cfa0d4697%7C0%7C0%7C637789889172321557%7CUnknown%7CTWFpbGZsb3d8eyJWIjoiMC4wLjAwMDAiLCJQIjoiV2luMzIiLCJBTiI6Ik1haWwiLCJXVCI6Mn0%3D%7C3000&sdata=HTPG18AsRhNml9JrqUXectC%2Bty%2F1AHCcDLB4ZPuNRZ4%3D&reserved=0) or in Spanish at: [twitter.com/usdafoodsafe\_es](https://gcc02.safelinks.protection.outlook.com/?url=http%3A%2F%2Ftwitter.com%2Fusdafoodsafe_es&data=04%7C01%7C%7C5e261632ab2d4d4af52608d9e28668a9%7Ced5b36e701ee4ebc867ee03cfa0d4697%7C0%7C0%7C637789889172321557%7CUnknown%7CTWFpbGZsb3d8eyJWIjoiMC4wLjAwMDAiLCJQIjoiV2luMzIiLCJBTiI6Ik1haWwiLCJXVCI6Mn0%3D%7C3000&sdata=CwYaBvjzJmwQHN9OcmfRSXjzqON5hReuKs6iymaviMo%3D&reserved=0).

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