



Staying healthy

Keeping germs at bay is one of the best ways of staying healthy.

There are millions of types of microbes about. Most are harmless, but some may cause disease. If you want to keep these germs away, then science gives you a few simple rules to follow.

Store food safely

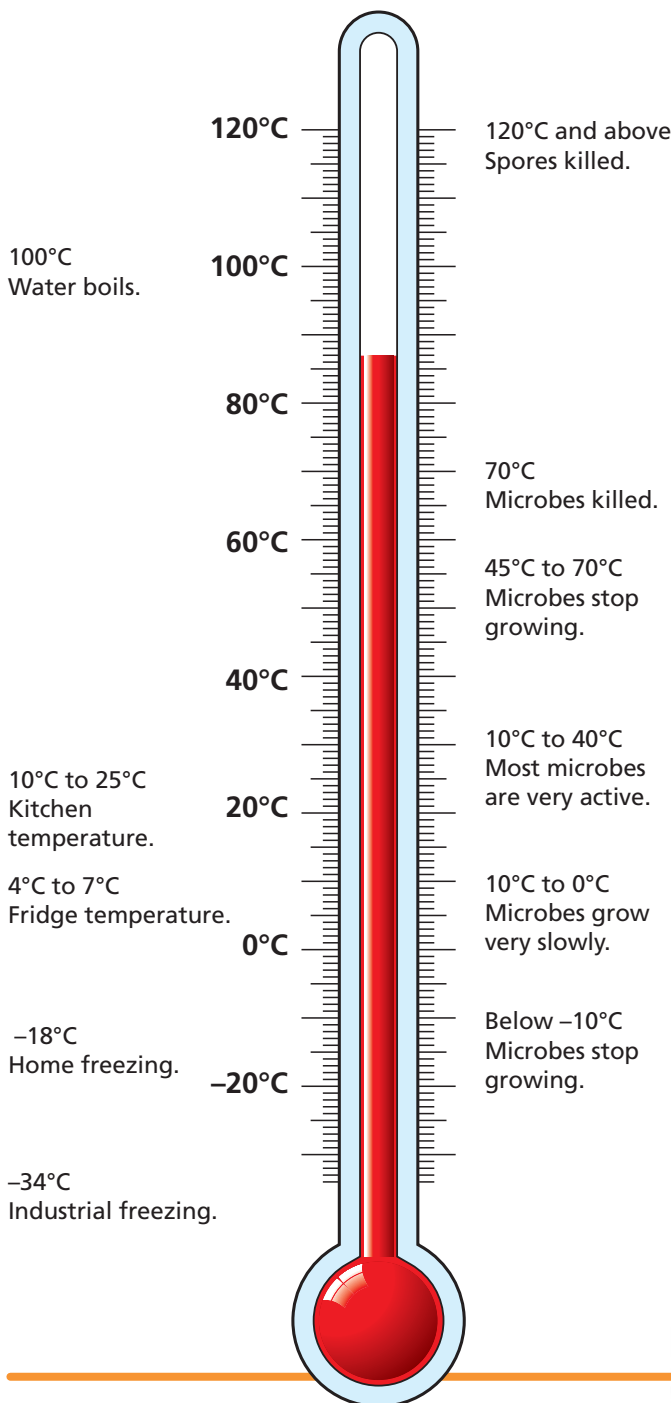
Most of the time when food smells bad and goes rotten, it is because of the growth of fungi. But the great majority of food poisoning cases are caused by bacteria. In part this is because food infected by bacteria may not look, taste or smell bad.

The bacteria that cause the most trouble are called salmonella. They often get into the food from the hands of people who have been to the toilet and then not washed their hands, or from the feet of flies that have settled on human waste and then on food.

Even those bacteria that cause food poisoning are only harmful in large numbers. Warm conditions allow bacteria to grow quickly (Picture 1). So, if cooked food is warmed it will be much more dangerous than the same food when cold.

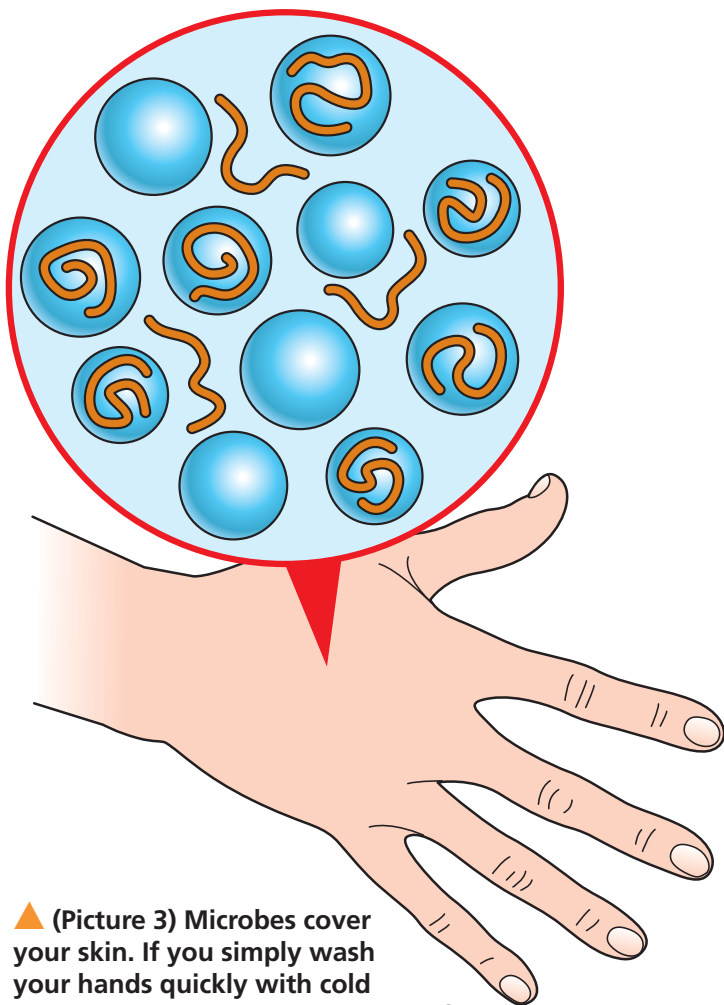
Food-poisoning bacteria will not grow and multiply quickly if the temperature is below 7°C. This is why refrigerators should be set below this temperature.

◀ (Picture 1) This diagram shows the temperatures that are needed to stop microbes from growing quickly. A refrigerator only slows them down. A freezer stops them growing almost entirely because it is so much colder. Notice that at high temperatures (for example in an oven) all microbes are destroyed, which is one reason why we cook foods.





▲ (Picture 2) Chlorine is added to tap water and swimming pool water to act as a disinfectant and kill germs.



▲ (Picture 3) Microbes cover your skin. If you simply wash your hands quickly with cold water, you only take away some of the microbes. The only way to remove most of the microbes is to wash your hands with soap and hot water.

Don't spread germs

Using a disinfectant kills germs (Picture 2), and so does *thorough* cooking.

Bacteria can also get onto food from hands (Picture 3). Washing your hands with soap and water loosens the bacteria's grip on your skin, and allows them to be washed away. Rinsing with water alone does not loosen all germs.

You can also pick up germs from objects, such as doorknobs and stair railings, touched by other people who aren't good handwashers.



So always wash your hands:

- ▶ *Before* putting your fingers in your mouth or rubbing your eyes.
- ▶ *Before* treating a wound.
- ▶ *Before* handling food – even your packed lunch or snack.
- ▶ *After* you have been to the toilet.
- ▶ *After* you have handled raw meat.
- ▶ *After* you handle rubbish.
- ▶ *After* you handle a pet.
- ▶ *After* you help someone who is ill.

Summary

- Cool conditions stop the growth of bacteria on food.
- Store raw foods away from cooked foods.
- Always heat food to above 75°C.
- Wash hands with soap and water.
- Keep flies off food.