

Food and water hygiene

[Diarrhoea](#) is one of the most common health problems experienced by travellers, affecting 20% to 60% of overseas travellers. Many illnesses, including: [cholera](#), [hepatitis A](#) and [typhoid](#) are also spread by food and water contaminated with human waste.

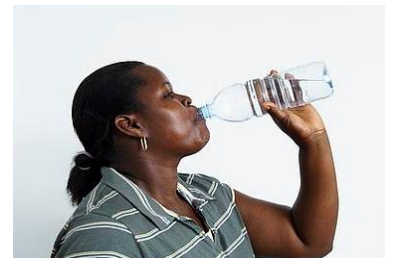
The following guidelines can help reduce your risk of illnesses caused by contaminated food or water:

Water

In some parts of the world, tap water is not available or is unsafe to drink. Don't add ice to your drinks and don't brush your teeth with tap water in countries where water is not considered safe to drink. Use boiled or bottled water from a safe source or chemically purified/filtered water instead.

Beware fake bottled water: avoid any product that you suspect may have been tampered with.

Bringing water to a boil is sufficient to purify it. Boiling for a least a minute is best if you are at an altitude higher than 2,000 metres or 6,562 feet. Chlorine water purification tablets are an alternative where boiling is not possible, as they kill most bacteria and viruses. They are sold by chemists and most specialist travel shops. However, they don't kill parasites like [Giardia](#) or Cryptosporidium. In this case, you can treat water with chlorine and then filter it with special portable filters. These can also be bought from travel shops. Domestic water filters, designed to stop limescale build-up in hard water areas of the UK, are not suitable.



Images courtesy of NHS Photo Library

Food

Many countries use human or animal waste (often called "night soil") to fertilise their crops. Some foods, especially those growing near the ground, can become contaminated with harmful bacteria if this type of manure is used.

Flies, insects and rodents can also spread diseases.

Potentially unsafe foods:

- Salads.
- Raw fruit and vegetables, unless you wash and peel them yourself.
- Food left exposed to flies.
- Food shared with lots of people, such as buffets.
- Any unpasteurised products, including dairy products and fruit juices.
- Undercooked or raw fish, meat or shellfish.
- Reheated food – especially fish, meat or rice.
- Takeaways and street food – unless thoroughly cooked in front of you.
- Unpasteurised milk, cheese, ice cream and other dairy products.
- Fresh or cooked food that has been allowed to stand at room temperature in warm environments.



Do not assume food served in expensive hotels or restaurants is safe - if food preparation staff do not take care with food handling or personal hygiene, ingredients can be contaminated. Try to eat freshly prepared, thoroughly cooked food, served piping hot.

Always carefully wash your hands after: using the toilet, changing nappies, any contact with animals or sick people and before preparing or eating food.



'Boil it, cook it, peel it, or forget it!'

Links:

[CDC: Keeping your hands clean on a cruise.](#)

[Health Protection Agency: Travellers' Diarrhoea.](#)

[NaTHNaC: Travellers' Diarrhoea.](#)

[NHS Choices: Food Poisoning.](#)

[NHS Choices: Norovirus.](#)

[World Health Organization: Food Safety.](#)