Food safety week 2015

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Australian Food Safety Week is an annual nationwide food safety education campaign and the theme this year is ‘Did you know? (Busting the food safety myths)’. During the Australian Food Safety Week, 8 to 15 November 2015, the Department of Health Food Unit is running a competition for primary schools with the help of the WASCA.

There are many myths out there about what causes food poisoning. In 2014 there was an estimated 4.1 million cases of food poisoning in Australia which could have been easily prevented. A few simple actions can cut the likelihood of food poisoning drastically.

During Food Safety Week people are encouraged to question some of the food safety tips they have received from family and friends and always believed are correct.

Common food safety facts (true) and myths (false):

- **Loading the fridge up with food and drinks will help it to maintain a cold temperature.**
  
  **FALSE** — Overloading the fridge reduces airflow, making it much harder to keep its contents below 5°C. Between 5°C and 60°C food poisoning bacteria start to multiply to dangerous levels.

- **The best way to defrost food is to leave it on the work surface (bench).**
  
  **FALSE** — It can take hours for food to defrost and while the centre stays frozen the outside can reach room temperature much more quickly. For example, if a whole chicken is left to defrost on the work surface for hours the surface can reach a dangerous temperature allowing bacteria to multiply, while the centre slowly defrosts. The safest way to defrost food is in the fridge or the microwave.

- **Eating food after the ‘best before’ date will be fine.**
  
  **TRUE** — ‘Best before’ dates are about food quality not safety. They are usually found on food that lasts a long time. If food has passed its ‘best before’ date it does not mean it is unsafe, but it might have started to lose its colour, flavour or texture.

- **Eating food past the ‘Use by’ could make me sick.**
  
  **TRUE** — ‘Use by dates’ are based on scientific testing and inform consumers how long food will stay safe. Do not be tempted to eat food after the ‘use by’ date on the label, even if it looks and smells fine.

- **If food looks ok and smells ok it’s safe to eat.**
  
  **FALSE** — Although a bad smell or taste are signs that food has ‘gone off’, these signs often are not caused by bacteria that give you food poisoning. Stick to the ‘use by’ date and storage instructions on the packet.

- **Plastic chopping boards are more hygienic than wooden ones.**
  
  **FALSE** — There is not any strong evidence that one type of chopping board is more or less hygienic than another. It is important that the board gets cleaned properly after every use and separate boards are used for raw and cooked foods. Boards must be replaced if damaged, for example from deep cuts or scoring.

- **If you have got an upset stomach it is usually from the last thing you ate.**
  
  **FALSE** — It is natural to suspect the food you ate most recently would be the cause of food poisoning, but that is rarely the case. Symptoms usually take between one and three days to develop, so it will not necessarily be from the last food you ate.

- **Most food poisoning is from ‘dodgy’ restaurants and takeaways.**
  
  **FALSE** — There is no specific evidence that food eaten out is more likely to cause food poisoning than food prepared at home.

- **Cooked rice can’t be kept as long as other leftovers.**
  
  **TRUE** — Leftover cooked rice is fine to eat as long as it gets cooled and refrigerated quickly after cooking and eaten within 24 hours. Rice can contain bacteria that can survive heating. Most other leftovers are safe to eat up to two days after cooking. Reheat leftovers until steaming hot. Do not reheat more than once.

- **You don’t need to wash raw chicken before you cook it.**
  
  **TRUE** — Although most raw meat will have some bacteria on it, washing will not get rid of them. Washing is more likely to spread harmful bacteria onto hands, work surfaces, clothing and equipment through the splashing of water droplets. Thorough cooking will kill any bacteria present.