

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

12 November 2007

Australian men and young adults rate badly in food safety report card

Queensland Health's Darling Downs Population Health Unit is urging people, particularly young people and men to focus on food safety, following the release of the Food Safety Report Card by the Food Safety Information Council.

Environmental health director Virgil Kelk said the report card, based on the Council's tracking research, shows that most Australians have greatly improved their food safety knowledge in the 10 years since the founding of the Food Safety Information Council 10 years ago.

"However, Australian men and young adults rate the worst in their knowledge and practice of food safety."

"This may not have been an issue in the past but today men play an active role in the kitchen and they could be putting their family and friends at risk," he said.

"Also, many young adults work in the food service industry, so it's extremely important they have a sound knowledge of food safety."

"The Food Safety Information Council surveys found that seven per cent of women and 29 per cent of men didn't wash their hands at all after using the bathroom near a shopping centre food hall. There is no excuse for this as other Council surveys show that nearly all Australians understand how to wash their hands correctly, and that it's fundamental in reducing the risk of food poisoning."

"With an estimated 5.4 million cases of food poisoning each year in Australia, and with one fifth of these cases linked to practices in the home, we can do a lot better simply by getting back to basics – clean, chill, cook and separate," Mr Kelk said.

'Back to basics' is the theme of National Food Safety Week 2007, organised by the Food Safety Information Council.

The Food Safety Information Council is Australia's leading disseminator of consumer targeted food safety information. It is a non-profit entity supported by the Australian Department of Health and Ageing, state and territory health and food safety agencies, local government, and leading professional, industry and community organisations.

The Council's major activity is National Food Safety Week, held each year in the second week of November. For more information about food safety, visit www.foodsafety.asn.au or www.health.qld.gov.au.

Ends

Media contact: Robyn Kinne, Senior Public Affairs Officer, Southern Area Population Health Services, Queensland Health (07) 3000 9103 or 0402 287 027

Juliana Madden Food Safety Information Council 0417 491 139

Date: 12 November 2007

Food Safety Information Council report card on Australian food safety

Hand washing knowledge

- In 1997¹ 18.4 per cent did not know the importance of washing their hands before preparing food, 39.5% of those that washed their hands didn't use soap and 54.1 per cent of respondents did not wash their hands correctly before preparing food.
- In 2006² 97 per cent recognised correctly that you should wash your hands using soap and dry thoroughly on a clean towel.

Handwashing practical

- In a 2002 survey³, the best performers were primary school aged girls who all washed their hands. However, only 50 per cent of the primary school aged girls washed their hands for the correct time and only 55 per cent of this age group used soap correctly. The worst performers were males of all age groups with 29 per cent of males observed failed to wash hands at all and only 31 per cent of those observed used any soap.

Cross contamination

- In 1997, 28.9 per cent would reuse a utensil or just wipe it between chopping a raw product and a cooked one.
- In 2006, 87 per cent recognised that they had to wash a chopping board in soapy water and dry it after cutting up raw meat or chicken and before using it to chop a salad.

Minced meat, hamburger and sausages

- In 1997, 20 per cent would consume undercooked minced product.
- In 2006, 92 per cent recognised correctly that sausages should be cooked all the way through and 83% recognised that hamburgers should be cooked all the way through.

Leftovers

- In 1997, 85 per cent would leave leftovers to cool at room temperature before refrigeration.
- In 2006, 67 per cent would correctly put it straight in the fridge.

Gender

Female knowledge of food safety was better than male in all surveys.

Age

Food safety knowledge increased with age but decreased slightly with the over 60s.

¹ Jay, L Stephen, Derio Comar and Lachlan Govenlock. 1998 Hazards and exposure in the meat distribution, foodservice and home sector: MSHE:2007 report prepared for the Meat Research Corporation.

² Newspan 2006 Food Safety Week Study for the Food Safety Information Council

³ Food Safety Information Council 2002 Handwashing understanding and behaviour by consumers.

<http://www.foodsafety.asn.au/publications/articlesandsurveys/handwashingsurvey.cfm>