

No, you shouldn't wash raw chicken before cooking it. So why do people still do it?

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Food safety authorities and regulators [around the world recommend](#) you don't wash raw poultry before cooking.

That's because washing chicken can splash [dangerous bacteria](#) around the kitchen. It's best just to thoroughly cook the chicken without washing it, so it is safe to eat.

Despite this, chicken-washing remains common. A [survey](#) by Australia's Food Safety Information Council showed almost half of Australian home cooks washed whole chickens before cooking. Dutch research found [25%](#) of consumers washed their chicken often or almost always.

So why do people do it—and what does the research say about the risks of chicken-washing?

Chicken meat and germs

Incorrect cooking temperatures and cross-contamination between different foods are two of the most important factors linked to foodborne illness.

This is particularly relevant to poultry meat. Two leading causes of [foodborne illness](#) are the [bacteria *Campylobacter*](#) and [Salmonella](#), which are commonly found on raw poultry.

In Australia, reported cases of *Campylobacter* and *Salmonella* have almost [doubled](#) over the last two decades.

Of the estimated 220,000 cases of *Campylobacter* infection each year, [50,000](#) can be attributed either directly or indirectly to chicken meat.

Chicken-washing myths, busted

One [analysis](#) of consumer responses to an education campaign about the dangers of washing raw poultry shed light on why many people still wash raw chicken before cooking.

Some believe there is a need to wash faeces and other matter off the chicken meat. In fact, modern processing techniques mean chicken carcasses do not need additional cleaning.

Others believe washing with a slightly acidic solution (such as vinegar or lemon juice) will kill bacteria.

On the contrary, [research](#) has shown washing raw poultry in [lemon juice](#) or vinegar does not remove bacteria and can increase the cross-contamination risk.

Washing chicken splashes bacteria around

One of the more compelling arguments why washing raw [poultry](#) under a running tap is a risky activity comes from [recent research](#) on water droplets ejected from the surface of washed chicken.

The study clearly showed bacteria can be transferred from the surface of the chicken to surrounding surfaces via water droplets.

Using high-speed imaging, the researchers found a higher tap height can increase splashing.

Chicken meat is often soft and the [water flow](#) can create a divot in the surface. This leads to splashing that would not occur on a curved, hard surface.

The researchers placed large agar plates next to the chicken surfaces to capture any [water droplets](#). This allowed them to grow the bacteria that were transferred with the splashed water.

They found the level of bacterial transmission increased with greater tap height and water flow rate.

Aerated water (which is what you get when the tap is running very hard) also increased splashing and bacterial transmission.

What if I still really want to wash my chicken meat?

While washing [raw poultry](#) is not recommended, it appears some home cooks are reluctant to let go of this old habit.

If you insist on washing [chicken](#) meat, consider doing so in a sink of [water](#) rather than under a running tap.

Use a paper towel to mop up any liquids, dispose of the towel and clean up afterwards.

This will help reduce the risk of cross-contamination and keep the kitchen safe. And please wash your hands after handling raw [meat](#)!

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