Waiter, there's blood in my soup? Does the chef have any diseases?  [1]

Dear Alice,

I was in a restaurant where I saw a cook cut his hand, and go on about making food. Can people who eat this contaminated food get diseases from his blood, like HIV, hepatitis, etc.???

Thanks.

Answer

Dear Reader,

Nauseating and unsanitary, yes, but transmitting HIV or hepatitis via blood-contaminated food is extremely unlikely, if not outright impossible. While HIV and some types of hepatitis (B and C) are blood-borne diseases, getting them from human blood on food is a scenario that you probably needn't spend too much time worrying about. Several issues to consider here include:

- The cook may or may not have a blood-borne illness.
- The amount of blood involved was most likely small.
- The food may have been cooked after any blood came in contact with it? viruses are not very resistant to heat.

Hepatitis B and C and HIV can all be transmitted through contact of infected blood with mucous membranes; the lining of your mouth is one example. But viruses are transmitted primarily by direct contact. A lot of time and a lot of material were in the way for any virus in the cook's blood to make its way to your bloodstream.

While it's unlikely that you could get hepatitis B or C or HIV from blood in food, you might question the overall sanitation in that restaurant. A chef allowing his or her blood to get into the food s/he's preparing may be a sign of general low hygienic standards. Hepatitis A, less likely to cause serious health problems than B or C, is commonly transmitted through food that is contaminated as a result of poor hygiene. Common causes of food poisoning, such as unsanitary conditions and undercooked meat and shellfish, would be more likely to cause you illness than blood in your food. If you suspect an overall lack of hygiene at this restaurant, you can make a report to your city or county Department of Health. Many cities list health code inspection results online. You may also want to take a look at the related Q&As for more
information on general food safety concerns.

Take care,

Alice!

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Published date:
Aug 23, 2002
Last reviewed on:
Apr 16, 2015

Source URL: http://goaskalice.columbia.edu/answered-questions/waiter-theres-blood-my-soup-%E2%80%94-does-chef-have-any-diseases

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