

## **‘BE VIGILANT ABOUT FOOD HYGIENE’ - HOLIDAY- MAKERS WARNED**

Holiday-makers planning their next trip abroad should be wary of poor hygiene standards which could lead to food poisoning, according to the Association of Personal Injury Lawyers (APIL) and Holiday Which? magazine.

Food poisoning can be a potential hazard anywhere - even the family kitchen - but, as with any health problem, being taken ill abroad can be particularly distressing, and it's especially important to be vigilant with food which has been prepared by others, such as hotels and restaurants.

Solicitor Jane Goulding, an experienced personal injury lawyer and member of APIL, is currently representing more than 600 people who suffered food poisoning - including two e.coli cases - during all-inclusive package holidays last year.

“People suffered symptoms such as stomach cramps, dizziness, and sickness and diarrhoea, most of which lasted several days - but some were suffering for months, and a few people are still ill,” said Jane. “It soon became obvious that this was no simple case of holiday tummy.

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“Badly cooked food, poor refrigeration and dirty crockery can all combine to cause health problems which can ruin a holiday and continue to cause serious problems after returning home.”

And other APIL members have backed the call for vigilance. Keith Lawson-West is currently acting for three people who suffered severe food poisoning on a Nile cruise last year, as well as a group of four people who were ill while on holiday in Majorca.

“Spanish doctors in Majorca told my clients that this is an ongoing problem,” he said, “and if an elderly or very young person is affected, the results can be very serious - two of my clients nearly died.”

Holiday Which? magazine has been inspecting and reporting on unsatisfactory standards for food hygiene in foreign hotels for many years.

“The number of hygiene casualties, and consequently the number of complaints, has rocketed in the last few years since tour operators introduced all-inclusive package holidays with hotels that serve buffet-style food on a large scale,” said a spokesman for the magazine.

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“The best way to obtain real redress, having suffered illness due to the negligence of a tour operator or hotel, is for consumers to band together with other victims and take joint action against the operator.”

APIL, which has 3,700 members in Britain and abroad, is committed to alerting the public to potential health and safety hazards and Clive Garner, whose firm has handled thousands of cases in this field, believes that some tour operators should be working harder to protect consumers.

“Responsible holiday companies are making efforts to tighten up hotel health and hygiene standards,” he said. “Unfortunately, some still have a lot of work to do. In the meantime, some holiday-makers continue to be at risk of developing potentially life-threatening conditions.”

Holiday Which? offers the following advice to help avoid stomach problems:

- \* Avoid premises where there is an obvious fly problem
- \* Avoid food left on display at room temperature without protection
- \* Choose items which are cooked in front of you, or which would have to be cooked to order, such as steak or fish
- \* Reject undercooked chicken

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\* If you order from the menu, refuse dishes that are served at the wrong temperature (cold foods too warm or hot foods not piping hot)

\* Complain to your representative if you feel that basic hygiene requirements are not met or if you suffer from food-poisoning symptoms.

On returning home, inform your GP.

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**Note to editors:**

Since APIL was formed in 1990, the association has alerted the public to a number of hazards, with the aim of improving safety standards for the public. Previous 'hazard alerts' include the dangers of lap seat belts when used by children travelling in the rear of cars; front under-runs on lorries; and inadequate compensation paid to those killed or injured in air accidents.

A report in the forthcoming Spring edition of Holiday Which? (March 10) gives the background to group legal actions and what they can accomplish in the field of holiday redress.

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