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**Awareness of medical students about the factors and characteristics of  
bacterial food poisoning**

Food poisoning is, unfortunately, a well-known problem worldwide. Bacterial food poisoning is a multi etiological group of diseases that occur when food contaminated with bacteria or their toxins is consumed. According to the WHO, 600 million people worldwide suffered from food poisoning of various etiology, resulting in 420,000 deaths. According to the pre-war statistics of the Ministry of Health of Ukraine, only 20 % of people in case of food poisoning seek medical care, while the remaining 80 % treat themselves. It is clear that during the war, especially in settlements under occupation or close to the war zone, this ratio is even worse. People do not have access to doctors, the water supply system is often destroyed, and even basic personal hygiene is difficult to maintain. According to doctors, the main causes of food poisoning in peacetime were dirty hands and the consumption of low-quality food, particularly in street vendors' shops. Currently, there are no statistics on food poisoning in many regions for obvious reasons, but the main causes include eating low-quality and expired food, violations of storage and cooking conditions, and neglect of basic personal hygiene rules. Therefore, in our opinion, it was very important to study the level of public awareness of the causes of food poisoning and the basic rules for its prevention.

The aim of the study was to identify the level of awareness of food poisoning factors and their prevalence among students of Kharkiv National Medical University.

The study was conducted through an anonymous survey using an online questionnaire of our own design. The survey involved 51 people under the age of 30.

The analysis of the responses revealed that 49 % of respondents said that they had suffered from food poisoning more than once in their lives. A significantly smaller proportion (39.2 %) was ill once in their lives. That is, the vast majority of survey participants recognise the fact of food poisoning in their lives. 56.9 % of respondents did not go to hospital and treated themselves at home. The most likely cause of the illness was a low-quality product, with expired shelf life and improper storage conditions also being among the most common causes. 35.3 % of respondents were poisoned by dairy products (kefir, yoghurt, milk), 33.3 % - by meat products, and a smaller number attributed the poisoning to salads with mayonnaise, cakes and pastries. Nausea and vomiting were the main symptoms in 60.8 % of respondents, with diarrhoea and abdominal pain being less common. 27.5 % of respondents suffered from severe food poisoning.

31 people (60.8 %) attributed the poisoning to the consumption of domestic products, 11 (21.6 %) respondents - to products of unknown origin and 8 - to home-cooked food.

More than 66% of the survey participants are aware of the existence of many types of poisoning agents. More than 29 % know about E. coli and two are not aware of it at all. Almost everyone knows about the conditions and causes of microbial growth.

Of those surveyed, 43 % of people suffered from food poisoning more often between the ages of 7 and 12, and 21.6 % between the ages of 12 and 18. The rest did not note any significant changes depending on age.

Thus, it was found that the prevalence of food poisoning is very high, and this situation may worsen during the war. According to our data, people under the age of 18 are most often poisoned, and most of them do not seek medical help but treat themselves. At the same time, the majority of respondents pay attention to the shelf

life of products and the country of manufacture, and prefer domestic products. It is interesting to note that none of the respondents mentioned neglect of hygiene rules as a possible cause of the disease. In our opinion, this indicates a certain subjective attitude to their own behaviour, but it is possible that all students do follow these rules. In general, we can conclude that understanding the causes of food poisoning and its initial symptoms, as well as the need for strict adherence to hygiene rules and requirements, is an important basis for preventing this common type of disease.