



Do I have Food Poisoning?

What is foodborne illness (disease, infection)?

Foodborne illness (sometimes called “foodborne disease,” “foodborne infection” or “food poisoning”) is a common, costly—yet preventable—public health problem. Each year, 1 in 6 Americans gets sick by consuming contaminated foods or beverages. Many different disease-causing microbes, or pathogens, can contaminate foods, so there are many different foodborne infections. In addition, poisonous chemicals or other harmful substances can cause foodborne diseases if they are present in food.

- More than 250 different foodborne diseases have been described. Most of these diseases are infections, caused by a variety of bacteria, viruses and parasites that can be foodborne.
- Other diseases are poisonings, caused by harmful toxins or chemicals that have contaminated the food, e.g. poisonous mushrooms.
- These different diseases have many different symptoms, so there is no one “syndrome” that is foodborne illness. However, the microbe or toxin enters the body through the gastrointestinal tract, and often causes the first symptoms there, so nausea, vomiting, abdominal cramps and diarrhea are common symptoms in many foodborne diseases.

How many cases of foodborne disease are there in the United States?

CDC estimates that each year roughly 1 in 6 Americans (or 48 million people) gets sick, 128,000 are hospitalized, and 3,000 die of foodborne diseases.

What foods are most associated with foodborne illness?

- Raw foods of animal origin are the most likely to be contaminated; that is, raw meat and poultry, raw eggs, unpasteurized milk and raw shellfish.
- Because filter-feeding shellfish strain microbes from the sea over many months, they are particularly likely to be contaminated if there are any pathogens in the seawater.
- Foods that mingle the products of many individual animals, such as bulk raw milk, pooled raw eggs or ground beef, are particularly hazardous because a pathogen present in any one of the animals may contaminate the whole batch.
 - » A single hamburger may contain meat from hundreds of animals.
 - » A single restaurant omelet may contain eggs from hundreds of chickens.
 - » A glass of raw milk may contain milk from hundreds of cows.
 - » A broiled chicken carcass can be exposed to the drippings and juices of many thousands of other birds that went through the same cold water tank after slaughter.

Fruits and vegetables consumed raw are of particular concern. Washing can decrease but not eliminate a contamination, so the consumers can do little to protect themselves.

- Recently, a number of outbreaks have been traced to fresh fruits and vegetables that were processed under less than sanitary conditions. These outbreaks show that the quality of the water used for washing and chilling the produce after it is harvested is critical. Using water that is not clean can contaminate many boxes of produce.
- Fresh manure used to fertilize vegetables can also contaminate them. Alfalfa sprouts and other raw sprouts pose a particular challenge, as the conditions under which they are eaten is without further cooking. That means that a few bacteria present on the seeds can grow to high numbers of pathogens on the sprouts.
- Unpasteurized fruit juice can also be contaminated if there are pathogens in or on the fruit that is used to make it.

Should you have any questions or need further assistance, please visit our website, send an email or call us.

Do I have Food Poisoning? (continued)

WHAT CAN YOU DO TO PROTECT YOURSELF AND YOUR FAMILY FROM FOOD POISONING?

Wash hands and surfaces often.

Illness-causing bacteria can survive in many places around your kitchen, including your hands, utensils and cutting boards.

- Wash hands the right way—for 20 seconds with soap and running water. Be sure to scrub the backs of your hands, between your fingers and under your nails.
- Wash surfaces and utensils after each use. Rinsing utensils, countertops and cutting boards with hot, soapy water. Clean surfaces and cutting boards with a bleach solution.
- Wash fruits and veggies—but not meat, poultry, or eggs. Even if you plan to peel fruits and veggies, it's important to wash them first because bacteria can spread from the outside to the inside as you cut or peel them.



Don't cross-contaminate.

Even after you've cleaned your hands and surfaces thoroughly, raw meat, poultry, seafood and eggs can still spread illness-causing bacteria to ready-to-eat foods—unless you keep them separate.

- Use separate cutting boards, plates and utensils for raw (uncooked) produce and for raw (uncooked) meat, poultry, seafood and eggs.
- Keep meat, poultry, seafood and eggs separate from all other foods while you're shopping at the grocery store.
- Keep meat, poultry, seafood and eggs separate from all other foods in the refrigerator.



Cook to the right temperature.

While many people think they can tell when food is “done” simply by checking its color and texture, there's no way to be sure it's safe without following a few important but simple steps.

- Use a food thermometer. Make sure food reaches its safe minimum cooking temperature. For example, internal temperatures should be 145°F for whole meats (allowing the meat to rest for 3 minutes before carving or eating), 160°F for ground meats, and 165°F for all poultry. Eggs should be cooked until the yolk is firm.
- During meal times, while food is being served and eaten, keep it hot (at 140°F or above). After meals are over, refrigerate leftover food quickly.
- Microwave food thoroughly (to 165°F).



Refrigerate promptly.

Illness-causing bacteria can grow in many foods within two hours unless you refrigerate them. (During the summer heat, cut that time down to one hour.)

- Refrigerate the foods that tend to spoil more quickly (like fruits and vegetables, milk, eggs and meats) within two hours. Warm foods will chill faster if they are divided into several clean, shallow containers.
- Thaw or marinate foods in the refrigerator, never on the counter in the kitchen sink.
- Know when to throw food out.



Source: Centers for Disease Control & Wellness, Food Safety Division



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