



Foodborne Illness

Foodborne illness is caused by eating contaminated foods or beverages. There are more than 250 different foodborne diseases, most of which are caused by a variety of bacteria, viruses and parasites. The most common foodborne diseases are caused by Salmonella, E-coli bacteria, Hepatitis A and Botulism. Each year, 48 million people or roughly 1 in 6 persons get sick, 128,000 are hospitalized and 3,000 die of foodborne illness. Take precaution and don't become a statistic by being prepared.

How does food become contaminated?

We live in a world full of bacteria and there are many opportunities for food to become contaminated as it is produced and prepared. Many foodborne bacteria are present in the intestines of healthy farm animals. Meat and poultry can become contaminated during slaughter by contact with small amounts of intestinal contents. Similarly, fresh fruits and vegetables can be contaminated in the field by water that is contaminated with animal manure or human sewage.

During food preparation, microbes can be transferred from one food to another by using the same knife, cutting board or other utensil to prepare both without washing the surface or utensils in between uses. An infected food handler can also contaminate food when hand washing is not sufficient. Refrigeration is also important in minimizing the growth of bacteria.

How can a person get a foodborne illness?

Foodborne illnesses typically occur by eating contaminated foods. Common symptoms of foodborne illness include diarrhea, stomach cramping, fever, headache, vomiting, severe exhaustion and sometimes blood or mucous in the stools. However, symptoms will vary according to the type of bacteria and the amount of contaminated food eaten.

How long does it take a person to get sick/symptoms?

Symptoms can start to appear anywhere from a few hours to four or five weeks after bacteria or viruses enter the body. Symptoms usually last only a day or two, but in some cases can remain as long as a week to 10 days. For most healthy people, foodborne illnesses are neither long-lasting nor life-threatening. However, foodborne illnesses can be severe in the very young, the very old, and people with certain chronic diseases and immuno-compromised conditions.

How are foodborne diseases treated?

There are many different kinds of foodborne diseases and they may require different treatments, depending on the organisms and the symptoms they cause. Illnesses that consist of mainly diarrhea or vomiting can lead to dehydration if the person loses more body fluids and salts (electrolytes) than he/she takes in. Therefore, replacing lost fluids and salts and keeping up with fluid intake is important.

For mild cases of foodborne illness, the individual should drink plenty of liquids to replace fluids lost through vomiting and diarrhea. For simple diarrhea, a person can take anti-diarrheal medications to reduce the duration and severity. However, these medications should be avoided if there is high fever or blood in the stools because they may make the illness worse. If diarrhea is moderate (especially in young children), oral rehydration solutions (ORS) should be taken to replace fluid losses and prevent dehydration. Sports drinks usually do not replace the losses correctly and should not be used for the treatment of diarrheal illness. When symptoms are severe or persist, seek medical attention.

How can people protect themselves from foodborne illness?

A few simple precautions can reduce the risk of foodborne diseases:

COOK: Cook meat, poultry and eggs thoroughly. Using a thermometer to measure the internal temperature of meat is a good way to be sure that it is cooked sufficiently to kill bacteria. For example, ground beef should be cooked to an internal temperature of 155°F. Eggs should be cooked until the yolk is firm (145°F.)



SEPARATE: Don't cross-contaminate one food with another. Avoid cross-contaminating foods by washing hands, utensils and cutting boards after they have been in contact with raw meat or poultry and before they touch another food. Put cooked meat on a clean platter, rather than back on one that held the raw meat.

CHILL: Refrigerate leftovers correctly. Bacteria can grow quickly at room temperature, so refrigerate leftover foods if they are not going to be eaten within 4 hours. Large volumes of food will cool more quickly if they are divided into several small containers for refrigeration.

CLEAN: Wash fruits and vegetables. Rinse them in running water to remove visible dirt. Remove and throw away the outer leaves of a head of lettuce or cabbage. Because bacteria can grow well on the cut surface of fruits and vegetables, be careful to not contaminate these foods while slicing them upon unclean cutting boards. Don't be a source of foodborne illness yourself. Wash your hands with soap and water before preparing food. Avoid preparing food for others if you have diarrhea. Changing a baby's diaper while preparing food is a bad idea that can easily spread illness.

REPORT: Report suspected foodborne illnesses to your local health department. The health department is an important part of the food safety system. Often calls from concerned citizens are how outbreaks are first discovered.

Where can I get more information on foodborne illness?

Health Departments: Local county health department

www.cdc.gov

www.fda.gov

www.osha.gov

Source of Information:

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC)

Occupational Safety & Health (OSHA)

Food and Drug Administration (FDA)

This Alliant Risk Control Consulting fact sheet is not intended to be exhaustive. The discussion and best practices suggested herein should not be regarded as legal advice. Readers should pursue legal counsel or contact their insurance providers to gain more exhaustive advice.