

Foodborne Illnesses and Food Safety

The World Health Organization’s first ever estimates of the global burden of foodborne diseases show that almost 1 in 10 people fall ill every year from eating contaminated food and 420,000 die as a result. Children under 5 years of age are at particularly high risk, with 125,000 children dying from foodborne diseases every year.

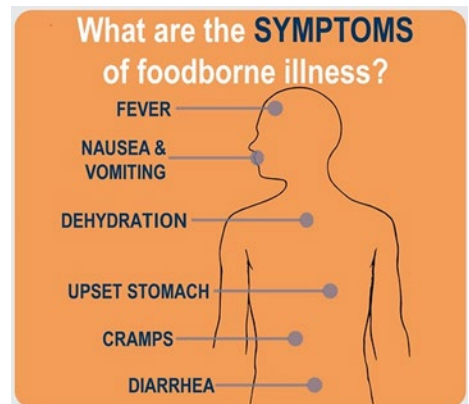
Today’s bacteria are more virulent and harder to control than in past years. Due to antibiotic over-use in the animal population, coupled with resistance to pesticides, it is more difficult to keep our food sources healthy and us safe. The liberal use of hand sanitizers, instead of soap and water, has affected our ability to temper food poisoning. Food poisoning is on the rise and has higher consequences for the young, the old, those with immune disorders, and those who suffer from a chronic illness such as diabetes. The bacteria, parasites, and viruses grow in the “temperature danger zone” over 40 degrees F (4.5 Celsius) and below 140 degrees F (60 Celsius).

FOODBORNE ILLNESS SYMPTOMS

In severe cases, foodborne illnesses can cause serious acute illness, long-term health problems, or death. **Simple foodborne illness** can present as a stomachache, nausea, or vomiting.

See your doctor or healthcare provider if you have:

- High fever (temperature over 101.5°F, measured orally).
- Blood in the stools.
- Frequent vomiting that prevents you from keeping liquids down.
- Signs of dehydration, including a decrease in urination, a dry mouth and throat, and feeling dizzy when standing up.
- Diarrheal illness that lasts more than 3 days.



FOOD SAFETY TIPS

1. Wash Hands with Soap and Water

Often, people want to blame food for their illness when it is the fact that their hands were not washed before food preparation and eating. Prior to any food preparation or grabbing something to eat, the best way to stay germ free is to wash hands with warm water and soap for a minimum of 20 seconds. Add repeated hand washing when working with raw foods including meat, poultry, and eggs. Dry hands with a single paper towel or fresh kitchen towel that has not been used to wipe down countertops. Always wash hands after handling garbage and trash.



2. Cutting Boards and Cross Contamination

Wood cutting boards need to be made from hard wood to reduce splintering, which allows and holds on to bacteria. Plastic cutting boards are easy to clean, but sharp grooves and scars allow bacteria to get in quickly. Plastic boards can be sanitized by using a bleach spray product or making your own from one tablespoon of household bleach in one gallon of water. Plastic cutting boards can also be placed in the dishwasher at high temperatures for sanitizing. Since they are usually inexpensive, plastic boards can be replaced more frequently.

The most important thing to remember is to use one cutting board for raw foods and place it in the sink immediately. Take a second cutting board and a second knife, after you have washed your hands, to prepare other foods to prevent cross-contamination.

3. Sponges and Dish Rags

Wet sponges and dish rags can harbor mold, yeast, and bacteria from moisture. After use, wash them in hot soapy water. You can place them in the dishwasher or microwave which will kill 99 percent of the bacteria. Sanitize sponges every other day and replace them often.

4. Do Not Rinse Raw Meat Prior To Cooking

People assume raw meat and poultry should be rinsed prior to cooking. Rinsing raw meat spreads bacteria around the sink and countertops which can affect other foods nearby. Bacteria are destroyed by the heat of the cooking process.

5. Be Wary of Bacteria in Foods

Bacteria can grow in meats and poultry (Salmonella), dairy, eggs, raw garlic stored in oil, melons (Listeria), sliced tomatoes, hot peppers, sprouts, cooked rice, beans, pasta, and potatoes.

Raw fruits and vegetables need to be carefully washed since water and fertilizer can be tainted with bacteria. Many times, when sickened by a chicken salad sandwich, people think it is from mayonnaise; but it is actually from the celery.

6. Properly Defrost Food

Many people think it is okay to defrost food at room temperature on the countertop or in the sink. It is wise to thaw in the refrigerator or in the microwave to avoid the “Temperature Danger Zone.” Otherwise more bacteria will be present.

7. Cook Foods Completely

Do not assume food is thoroughly cooked just by looking at it. When cooking burgers, poultry, and pork, make sure food is fully cooked by inserting a digital or dial thermometer for an internal temperature of 165 degrees F. This is helpful in grilling, baking, or roasting to make sure the food will not expose you to bacteria, especially since undercooked meat can cause E. coli.

8. Properly Marinate Food

Place food in the refrigerator when marinating, not at room temperature, and do not reuse marinade for cooked food. Leave some marinade which has not touched the raw food for dipping.



9. Putting Food Away

Once food is prepared and eaten, place the leftovers in the refrigerator within one hour in warm weather and within two hours in cool weather. Keeping food cool will prevent the growth of bacteria. Set your phone alarm to remind you if you are having a party and might forget.

10. Do Not Leave Hot Food Out

Do not place hot foods on the counter for more than 30 minutes, which could cause the spread of bacteria. If you have cooked large portions of soups, stews, or casseroles, put them in smaller containers no deeper than two inches to let them cool more quickly and place them in the refrigerator.

11. The Proper Way to Reheat Food

When taking leftovers out of the refrigerator, reheat foods to a full boil or bubble before eating. This includes soups, stews, crockpot meals, and casseroles. Mix foods thoroughly so the internal temperature gets to 165 degrees F throughout the dish.

12. Do Not Overstuff the Refrigerator

When food is jammed in the refrigerator, there is no air circulation and air flow, which does not allow food to be refrigerated properly. Use drawers for fresh fruits and vegetables, as well as packaged meats and cheeses. Put the food you use often near the front and less used in the back.

13. Wash Reusable Grocery Bags Often

Although wonderful for the environment, it is recommended that you frequently wash these reusable bags. Raw meat, poultry, and eggs can leave behind bacteria which can transfer to your next shopping trip.

14. Dispose of Leftovers After a Few Days

Consume or dispose of leftovers within 3–4 days for a safer bet. Freezing leftovers is easy and can be used later.



15. Dispose of Expired Food

You may not be able to smell or see changes in your food that contains bacteria, so be on the safe side and dispose of expired food. Be alert to foods that have been recalled and never use them.

If you have any questions about this topic, please reach out to CompassionLink at info@compassionlink.org. We will be happy to answer your questions.

RESOURCES

<https://www.cdc.gov/features/befoodsafe/>

<http://www.who.int/mediacentre/news/releases/2015/foodborne-disease-estimates/en/>

<https://www.adwdiabetes.com/articles/food-poisoning-food-safety>