

Foodborne Illnesses and Germs...Keep Food Safe

The Center for Disease Control estimates that each year 48 million people get sick from foodborne illness, 128,000 are hospitalized and 3,000 die.

There are many different disease causing germs that can contaminate foods, so there are many different foodborne infections. Researchers have identified more than 250 foodborne diseases. Most of these are infections that are caused by a variety of viruses, bacteria and parasites. Harmful toxins and chemicals can also contaminate food and cause foodborne illness.

There are common symptoms related to foodborne diseases that include nausea, vomiting, stomach cramps, and diarrhea. However, symptoms may differ among the different types of foodborne diseases. Symptoms can sometimes be severe and some can even be life threatening.

Although anyone can become sick, there are groups that have a greater risk for foodborne illness. These people include pregnant women, young children, older adults and people who have immune systems that have been weakened by a medical condition such as heart disease, diabetes, kidney disease, organ transplants, and cancer.

The top five germs that cause illnesses from food eaten in the United States are:

- **Norovirus** – Caused by person infected or contaminated foods such as leafy greens, fresh fruits, shellfish, or water, or by touching contaminated surfaces
- **Salmonella** – Can be caused by eggs, raw or under cooked poultry or meat, unpasteurized milk or juice, cheese, raw fruits and vegetables
- **Clostridium perfringens** – Sources include beef or poultry. Especially large roasts, gravies, dried or precooked foods.
- **Campylobacter** – Caused by raw or undercooked poultry, unpasteurized milk and contaminated water
- **Staphylococcus aureus** – Sources include foods that are not cooked after handling, such as sliced meats, puddings, pastries and sandwiches.

To reduce the risk of foodborne illnesses follow the following guidelines:

- Wash your hands with warm soap and water at least 20 seconds
- Clean and sanitize utensils, cutting boards, and countertops with hot soapy water.
- Rinse fresh fruits and vegetables under running water
- Separate raw meat, poultry, seafood and eggs from ready to eat foods.
- Use separate cutting boards and plates for raw meat, poultry and seafood.
- When you shop for groceries, keep raw meat, poultry, seafood and their juices away from other foods.
- Keep raw meats, poultry, seafood and eggs separate from all other foods in the refrigerator.
- Cook food safely to the proper internal temperature. Get the temperature high enough that it kills the germs that make you sick.

- Use a food thermometer to make sure you get the food to the proper temperatures
 - 145 degrees F. for whole cuts of beef, pork, veal and lam. Then allow the meat to rest for 3 minutes before carving or eating.
 - 160 degrees F. for ground meats, such as beef and pork
 - 165 degrees F. for all poultry, including ground chicken and turkey.
 - 165 degrees F for leftovers and casseroles
 - 145 degrees F for fresh ham (raw)
 - 145 degrees F for fish or cook until the flesh is opaque
- Keep your refrigerator below 40 degrees F. and know when to throw out. There is a good storage chart at <https://www.foodsafety.gov/keep/charts/storagetimes.html>.
- Refrigerate foods prepared within 2 hours. If outdoors and the weather is hot refrigerate within one hour.
- Thaw frozen food safely in the refrigerator, in cold water, or the microwave. Never thaw food on the counter or in the sink at room temperature.

Source: Center for Disease Control – Food Safety.