

FOODBORNE ILLNESS

Foodborne Illness: A disease that is carried or transmitted to humans by food containing harmful substances such as bacteria, viruses and toxins produced by bacteria. These bacteria and viruses can be found in our air, soil, dust, water household pets, and in people. Most bacteria are harmless unless they are allowed to multiply. Food contaminated with these bacteria or viruses and left at or above room temperature provides a perfect environment for bacteria to multiply. Bacteria also grow well in raw or undercooked meat, chicken, seafood, eggs, milk, and dairy products.

Most cases of foodborne illness are mild and may even be dismissed as stomach flu. However, some foodborne illness caused by some potent bacterium can be fatal especially in the elderly, children, pregnant women, diabetics, cancer patients, and in individuals with weakened immune system.

Symptoms

Contaminated food can look, smell, or taste perfectly fine. The only way you know that you have foodborne illness is when you experience the symptoms. The most common symptom of foodborne illness is diarrhea. Other symptoms may include nausea, vomiting, fever, and abdominal cramps. The onset of symptoms can occur anywhere from one hour to seven days after eating contaminated food.

Treatment

Increase fluids to prevent dehydration from vomiting or diarrhea. If the symptoms are severe, see your doctor immediately.

Fortunately, foodborne illness can be prevented if food is prepared, cooked, served,

and stored properly. The following tips can help you prevent foodborne illness:

Keep Food Clean

- Always wash your hands thoroughly with soap and water for 20 seconds before and after handling raw food.
- Use a fresh clean towel every time you cook.
- After handling raw meat, chicken, or seafood, thoroughly wash every item that came in contact with the raw food (including your hands) in hot soapy water.
- Use separate cutting boards for raw and cooked foods, or wash the cutting boards with soap and hot water in between each use.
- Avoid preparing food if you have a diarrhea condition.

Keep Hot Food Hot

- Cook all foods thoroughly. Use a meat thermometer to ensure that meat and chicken are fully cooked. Don't eat pork or chicken that looks pink. It is an indication of undercooking.
- Don't interrupt cooking. Partial cooking may encourage bacterial growth.
- Keep all perishable foods such as meat, poultry, eggs at room temperature for no more than two hours.
- Thoroughly reheat leftovers by covering it. This retains moisture and helps to heat the food more evenly.
- Cook eggs thoroughly. Do not eat eggs raw or soft-boiled (i.e. with running yolks).
- When cooking or reheating in the microwave oven without a turntable, be sure to rotate food at various intervals to ensure even cooking.

Keep Cold Food Cold

- Keep the freezer at 0°F or below and refrigerator at 40°F or below. Use a refrigerator thermometer to ensure proper temperature.
- Don't over-stuff the refrigerator. In order to keep food safe, cold air must circulate.
- Always keep perishable food refrigerated.
- Thaw frozen foods only in the refrigerator, microwave oven, or under cold running water, since bacteria multiply quickly at room temperature.
- Cool foods to be eaten later (e.g. leftovers) in the refrigerator, not on the kitchen counter. Divide large portions of food into smaller portions in shallow containers so it will cool faster.
- Always store eggs in the refrigerator.
- Avoid buying un-refrigerated items such as eggs, fresh soymilk, and tofu. These items should always be kept refrigerated to prevent bacterial growth.

What To Discard

- Moldy or spoiled foods
- Swollen, dented or damaged cans
- Refrigerated raw seafood after 24 hours
- Refrigerated red meat after 3-5 days
- Refrigerated poultry after 2 days
- Refrigerated leftovers after 3-4 days

With proper preparation, cooking and storage of food, you can reduce your risk of foodborne illness.