

PREVENTING FOODBORNE ILLNESS

What is a foodborne illness?

A foodborne illness is a disease that can be caused by a germ (virus or bacteria) or a chemical that contaminates the food you eat.

How does the food get contaminated (become unsafe)?

Food can be contaminated when a person who is preparing the food has not washed his/her hands. Fruit, vegetables, dairy products, meat and other food items can come into contact with soil, water, human/animal waste that contains illness-causing germs. Foodborne illness can be caused when food is not kept at the correct temperature and a germ in a food is allowed to multiply. Food can also become unsafe if a chemical (such as a cleaning product) is spilled into food.

What are the kinds of germs that make food unsafe?

The most common causes of foodborne illness are:

Salmonella:

bacteria that is in many different foods, most often in raw chicken or other meat (protein sources). Symptoms of salmonella infection include diarrhea (the 'runs'), fever and stomach cramps.

Campylobacter:

bacteria that is also in raw chicken. Symptoms of campylobacter include fever, headache, nausea, diarrhea and abdominal cramps.

E. coli:

bacteria which may be spread by water or food that has been contaminated by animal or human waste (stool). There are many kinds of E. coli. Some kinds can cause illness in humans. Symptoms of E. coli include severe diarrhea, sometimes even bloody diarrhea.

Shigella:

bacteria that is spread from an infected person who prepares/touches the food of others.

How can foodborne illness be prevented?

Foodborne illness is more prevalent in warmer weather. There's a higher risk of foodborne illness in the summertime because foodborne bacteria grow fastest at temperatures from 90 to 110 °F. Also, more people cook outside at picnics, barbecues and camping trips, away from refrigeration and washing facilities that a kitchen provides. To keep food safe during summer, and all year round, the Food Safety and Inspection Service of the United States Department of Agriculture recommends we "**Clean,**" "**Separate,**" "**Cook**" and "**Chill**":

Clean

Wash Hands and Surfaces Often. Unwashed hands and cooking and eating surfaces are a prime cause of foodborne illness.

- Wash your hands with warm, soapy water before handling food and after using the bathroom, changing diapers, and handling pets.
- When eating away from home, find out if there's a source of clean water. If not, bring water for preparation and cleaning. Or pack clean, wet, disposable washcloths, moist towelettes or antibacterial hand gel and paper towels for cleaning hands and surfaces.

Separate

Don't Cross-Contaminate. Cross-contamination during preparation, grilling and serving food can lead to foodborne illness.

- When packing the cooler chest for an outing, wrap raw meats securely; avoid raw meat juices from coming in contact with ready-to-eat food.
- Wash plates, utensils, and cutting boards that held the raw meat or poultry before using again for cooked food.
- Do not use marinade that's been used for raw meats to baste food once you've started to cook. Instead, set aside some of the marinade before you add the raw meat, poultry or fish.
- Do not use the loose ice used to pack your cooler as ice for your drinks. Pack beverage ice in separate, re-sealable bags.

Cook

Cook Food to Proper Temperatures. Food is properly cooked when it's heated for a long enough time and at a high enough temperature to kill bacteria that cause foodborne illness.

- Take your thermometer along. Meat and poultry cooked on a grill often browns very fast on the outside, so be sure that meats are cooked thoroughly. Check them with a food thermometer.
- Cook steaks and roasts that have been tenderized, boned, rolled, etc., to an internal temperature of 160 °F for medium and 170 °F for well-done. Whole steaks and roasts may be cooked to 145 °F for medium rare.
- Whole poultry should be cooked to 180 °F in the thigh; breast meat to 170 °F.
- Cook hamburger and other ground meats (veal, lamb, and pork) to an internal temperature of 160 °F, and ground poultry to 165 °F.
- Properly cooked fish should flake easily with a fork.
- Cook meat and poultry completely at the picnic site. Partial cooking of food ahead of time allows bacteria to survive and multiply to the point that subsequent cooking cannot destroy them.

Chill

Refrigerate Promptly. Holding food at an unsafe temperature is a prime cause of foodborne illness. Keep cold food cold.

- Marinate raw meat, poultry and fish in a covered dish in the refrigerator. Do not let marinating foods sit on the counter. Transport in a cooler separate from ready-to-eat foods.
- Cold refrigerated perishable food like luncheon meats, cooked meats, chicken, and potato or pasta salads should be kept in an insulated cooler packed with several inches of ice, ice packs, or containers of frozen water.
- Consider packing canned beverages in one cooler and perishable food in another cooler because the beverage cooler will probably be opened frequently. Keep coolers in the coolest part of the car, and place in the shade or shelter, out of the sun, whenever possible.
- If the ice starts to melt, put more into the cooler.

For more information: <http://cchealth.org/foodborne/preventing-tips.php>

Questions?

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Communicable Disease Guide for
Schools and Child Care Settings