



Factsheet on Food Poisoning

What is Food Poisoning?

Food poisoning is an illness that occurs after eating or drinking anything that is contaminated. Usually it is bacteria (germs) on the food that cause illness, but sometimes it can be chemicals, viruses or parasites. The most common food poison germ in the United Kingdom is Campylobacter.

The symptoms depend on what caused the illness but diarrhoea, sickness, stomach pains and sometimes high temperature/fever are the most common.

Illness may last for only a day or continue for one or two weeks.

How is food poisoning caught?

- By eating raw or undercooked food, or food that has been in contact with and contaminated by food poisoning germs
- By placing unwashed contaminated hands near or into the mouth
- By swallowing bacteria (germs) passed on from someone who is already ill with symptoms of diarrhoea & vomiting

Who can it affect?

Anyone can be affected however, the very young and the elderly are particularly vulnerable.

How can I tell if food is contaminated?

You can't - even food which looks and tastes good can cause food poisoning.

Do you need to stay off work or school?

Yes - until you have been completely free from any symptoms for 48 hours

Children should not play with other children and must not attend school or nursery until they are fully recovered and have been symptom free for 48 hours. This is very important as a symptomatic child can infect other children.

If you work as a food handler, with young children or in healthcare, you **must** inform your employer and /or seek advice from your local Environmental Health Department. You may be asked to provide a faeces/stool specimen.

How do I avoid catching it?

Good food hygiene – the '4 Cs'

Cleaning – hand washing with anti-bacterial soap and keeping work surfaces and utensils clean and disinfecting them with anti-bacterial spray.

Always wash hands thoroughly with soap and warm water and dry with disposable paper or a clean cotton towel:

- before preparing and eating food
- after going to the toilet
- after changing a baby's nappy
- after contact with pets and animals
- after handling raw food

Cooking – Thorough cooking kills food poisoning bacteria

- Make sure food (especially meat) is cooked right through and piping hot in the middle and don't re-heat food more than once

Chilling – Bacteria stop growing or forming toxins at low temperatures

- Read storage labels carefully and follow the instructions
- Cool any leftover food quickly and then put it in the fridge within one and half hours but eat within two days

Cross contamination – Where bacteria are passed from one surface to another. This can be direct, for example if blood drips from raw meat onto a sandwich or indirectly by the use of unwashed hands, equipment, work surfaces or utensils. To prevent this:

- Wash hands thoroughly before and after touching raw food
- Keep raw and ready to eat foods apart
- Store raw meat in sealed containers at the bottom of the fridge
- Use different boards for raw and ready to eat foods
- Clean all knives and other kitchen equipment and surfaces thoroughly after use with hot soapy water and dry thoroughly

Having a party?

- Ensure that anyone with diarrhoea/vomiting/nausea does not prepare food. Do not prepare food too far in advance. Keep the food either piping hot or refrigerated until it is served
- Keep the menu simple. The more dishes you prepare, the more likely things are to go wrong
- If you are giving food to a large number of guests it is best to use commercial caterers, they have equipment to prepare and store large amounts of food safely

If you or a member of your household has food poisoning

Ensure you and all household members wash their hands thoroughly with warm water and liquid soap and dry thoroughly:

- After using or cleaning the toilet
- After attending to another person who has diarrhoea/vomiting
- After changing a baby's nappy
- After handling or washing soiled clothes and bedding
- Before eating or preparing food

Where possible, do not prepare food for your family or anyone else. Ensure each person affected has their own towel for drying hands.

Ensure young children are supervised when washing hands, or have their hands washed for them.

Keep soiled washing separate from the rest of the washing.

Wash soiled clothes, bedding and towels separately on a hot cycle of the washing machine, and clean the outer surfaces of the machine after loading.

Clean toilet seats, flush handles, basins and taps more frequently than normal with hot soapy water. The toilet bowl should be cleaned with a toilet brush and disinfectant. Wear rubber gloves to clean the toilet and keep them for this purpose only.

If you are using a disinfectant or bleach, ensure that it conforms to a British Standard and follow the manufacturer's instructions. Keep all chemical cleaning agents in a safe place away from children.

Where possible stay away from other people until your symptoms have stopped, especially vulnerable people like the elderly and very young.

This factsheet has been reviewed by a multi-disciplinary team from the North West.

Further advice may be obtained from Cumbria and Lancashire Public Health England Centre. Telephone 0844 225 0602