Staphylococcus aureus Food Poisoning

What is Staphylococcus aureus food poisoning?
Staphylococcus aureus food poisoning is an illness with rapid onset due to the consumption of food contaminated with toxins produced by the organism Staphylococcus aureus.

Who is at risk for Staphylococcus aureus?
All individuals are believed to be susceptible to this type of bacterial intoxication; however, intensity of symptoms may vary person to person.

How do you get Staphylococcus aureus food poisoning?
By consuming foods that are contaminated with the toxin produced by S. aureus. Foods that are frequently incriminated in food poisoning caused by S. aureus include meat and meat products; poultry and egg products; salads such as egg, tuna, chicken, potato, and macaroni. Foods that require considerable handling during preparation and that are kept at room temperatures after preparation are frequently involved in S. aureus food poisoning.

Can Staphylococcus aureus be spread from person-to-person?
Yes, the bacteria can be passed from person to others by food handlers through skin infections. However, the toxin cannot be passed from one person to another.

What are the symptoms of Staphylococcus aureus food poisoning?
The most common symptoms are nausea, vomiting, and abdominal cramping. In more severe cases, headache, muscle cramping, and changes in blood pressure and pulse rate may occur. The illness is usually mild and most individuals recover after one to three days.

How soon will symptoms of S. aureus food poisoning appear?
The onset of symptoms is usually rapid (one to six hours) and in some cases immediate (within 30 minutes), depending on individual susceptibility, the amount of contaminated food eaten, the amount of toxin in the food ingested, and the general health of the individual. Symptoms come on very quickly because they are caused by a toxin in the food and the bacteria do not have to grow in a person before causing symptoms.

How is Staphylococcus aureus food poisoning diagnosed?
Signs and symptoms in individuals consuming food contaminated with S. aureus toxin and testing of implicated food are used to diagnose this illness.

How can Staphylococcus aureus be prevented?
Get more information on ways of preventing food poisoning on the DineSafe website www.toronto.ca/health/dinesafe/.