

Food Poisoning & Food Safety

Foodborne Illnesses and Germs

Foodborne illness (commonly known as food poisoning) can happen when people eat food that contains pathogens or toxins. Many different disease-causing germs, including bacteria, viruses, parasites and toxins produced by bacteria, can contaminate food.

Symptoms of Food Poisoning

Food poisoning symptoms may range from mild to severe and may differ depending on the germ. The most common symptoms of food poisoning are:

- Nausea
- Vomiting
- Stomach cramps
- Diarrhea
- Fever

After you consume a contaminated food or drink, it may take hours or days before you develop symptoms. If you experience symptoms of food poisoning, such as diarrhea or vomiting, drink plenty of fluids to prevent dehydration.

People Who Are Most at Risk for Food Poisoning

Anyone can get food poisoning, but certain groups of people are more likely to get sick and to have a more serious illness. Their bodies' ability to fight germs and sickness is not as effective for a variety of reasons.

These groups of people are:

- Pregnant women
- Young children
- Older adults
- People with weakened immune systems

When to See a Doctor for Food Poisoning

See your doctor or healthcare provider if you have symptoms that are severe, including:

- Bloody stools
- High fever (temperature over 38.5°C, measured orally)
- Frequent vomiting that prevents keeping liquids down (which can lead to dehydration)
- Signs of dehydration, including little or no urination, a very dry mouth and throat, or feeling dizzy when standing up
- Diarrhea that lasts more than 3 days

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Preventing Other People from Becoming Ill

If you are experiencing symptoms of food poisoning:

- Avoid preparing or serving food while ill
- Maintain good hand hygiene including hand washing after using sanitary facilities and before handling food

Food Safety

Keeping [food safe](https://www.toronto.ca/community-people/health-wellness-care/health-programs-advice/food-safety/food-safety-at-home/) (https://www.toronto.ca/community-people/health-wellness-care/health-programs-advice/food-safety/food-safety-at-home/) is the key to preventing foodborne illnesses. The four basic rules for keeping food safe are: clean, separate, cook, chill.

Clean

Wash hands and surfaces often. Wash hands with warm water and soap for at least 20 seconds before and after handling food. Wash cutting boards, utensils and countertops with hot soapy water after preparing each food item and before you go to the next food.

Separate

Don't cross-contaminate. Keep raw meat, poultry, seafood and their juices apart from other food items in your grocery cart.

Keep separate cutting boards for raw meats and vegetables, or clean your cutting board before re-using.

Cook

Cook food to a safe temperature. Use a food thermometer: you can't tell if food is cooked safely by how it looks.

Chill

Refrigerate promptly. Chill leftovers and takeout foods within 2 hours. Keep the fridge at 4 degrees Celsius (40 degrees Fahrenheit) or below.

Sources:

- <http://www.inspection.gc.ca/food/information-for-consumers/fact-sheets-and-infographics/food-poisoning/eng/1331151916451/133115205552>
- <http://www.health.gov.on.ca/en/public/programs/publichealth/foodsafety/whatis.aspx>
- <https://www.cdc.gov/foodsafety/symptoms.html>
- <https://www.canada.ca/en/health-canada/services/general-food-safety-tips/safe-internal-cooking-temperatures.html>