

## INFECTIOUS DISEASES *facts*

# *Food Poisoning – Facts*

### **What is food poisoning?**

Food poisoning includes foodborne intoxication and foodborne infections which are terms applied to illness acquired through consumption of contaminated food. These diseases include those caused by chemical contaminants such as heavy metals and many organic compounds.

### **What are the symptoms of food poisoning?**

You may experience a sudden onset of nausea, vomiting and diarrhea. The symptoms of food poisoning vary since different bacteria and the toxins they produce, viruses, parasites as well as toxins produced by harmful algal species will cause different symptoms to occur.

### **How soon do symptoms appear?**

This will be specific depending on the amount of bacteria and/or their toxins, virus or chemical contaminants that is ingested on food.

### **How is food poisoning diagnosed?**

It is diagnosed when your stool is examined under a microscope. You may have to send several specimens on different days because the micro-organism making you sick may not be found in every sample. A sample of the food that made you sick may also be tested at the laboratory to see if the micro-organism can be identified. Other tests your doctor may order might include blood tests and a urine sample.

### **How is food poisoning transmitted?**

Transmission occurs when you eat food that has been contaminated with bacteria and/ or their toxins, viruses, parasites and chemical contaminants. Different foods may be contaminated with different micro-organisms. Additional spread may occur from an ill person to others due to inadequate handwashing after using the toilet.

### **What is the treatment for food poisoning?**

Treatment alternatives vary because food poisoning can be caused by many different micro-organisms or chemicals. Your health care provider will discuss the treatment with you depending upon which micro-organism or chemical has made you sick.

### **What can be done to prevent food poisoning?**

Prevention and control of these diseases, regardless of the specific cause, are based on the same principles; avoidance of food contamination or destruction or destroying the contaminants. Prevention depends on educating food handlers about proper practices in cooking and storage of food and personal hygiene. The World Health Organization has developed "Ten Golden Rules for Safe Food Preparation." These are as follows:

1. Choose foods processed for safety.
2. Cook food thoroughly.
3. Eat cooked foods immediately.
4. Store cooked foods carefully.
5. Reheat cooked food thoroughly.
6. Avoid contact between raw food and cooked food.
7. Wash hands repeatedly.
8. Keep all kitchen surfaces clean and disinfect if required
9. Protect food from insects, rodents and other animals.
10. Drink water from wells, lakes and rivers that has been properly treated

In addition, all people who are travelling outside of Canada are advised to take certain precautions. This may include, but is not limited to the following: do not eat from street vendors, eat only cooked vegetables and eat only fruit that you have peeled yourself. Drink only water you have boiled or treated with chlorine or iodine. Other safe beverages include tea and coffee made with boiled water and soft drinks in cans, bottled beverages with no ice. Eat foods that have been thoroughly cooked and are still hot, and do not bring perishable seafood back from your travels.

While food poisoning may be attributable to numerous causative agents, vaccine protection is not available for all agents causing infection. Immunization is, however, available for Hepatitis A. For further information about this vaccine, please refer to your health care provider.

### **Are there any special concerns about food poisoning?**

If you believe that you may have food poisoning, you should seek immediate medical attention. If you have food poisoning and you are pregnant, you should promptly discuss this with your health care provider.

Individuals with food poisoning, who provide personal care to others, particularly seniors or children should not work while symptomatic. If you are a food handler you should not prepare or serve food until you are symptom free.

For more information please call the Communicable Disease Team in the Barrie Office at (705) 721-7520.

#### References

American Public Health Association. (2004). Foodborne intoxications (Food poisoning). D Heymann (Ed.), Control of Communicable Diseases Manual (18<sup>th</sup> ed., pg. 211-221). Washington, DC: American Public Health Association.

Centre for Disease Control (2001, June 20) Cholera. Retrieved August 21, 2002, from [http://www.cdc.gov/ncidod/dbmd/diseaseinfo/cholera\\_g.htm](http://www.cdc.gov/ncidod/dbmd/diseaseinfo/cholera_g.htm)