



Food Poisoning

What is Food poisoning?

Food poisoning is a group of illnesses you can get when you eat or drink contaminated food or water. Food poisoning covers all organisms that are non-reportable.

How is Food poisoning spread?

Food poisoning occurs when you eat or drink something that is contaminated with a germ or agent such as a chemical or heavy metal that makes you ill. You can spread the germs to others if you do not wash your hands after going to the bathroom and then prepare food for others to eat.

What symptoms should I watch for?

Symptoms will vary depending on the germ or agent causing the illness. Most people experience abdominal pain, diarrhea, nausea and sometimes vomiting. Fever and headache are sometimes present depending on the germ or agent. Dehydration, especially among the very young or very old may be severe, medical care may be required.

What is the treatment for Food poisoning?

Consulting with your health care provider is recommended as they may suggest antibiotics or treatments specific to the symptoms you are experiencing, such as fluid replacement to prevent dehydration.

How do I protect myself and others?

- Maintain good personal hygiene, including hand washing after using the bathroom and before handling food.
- Prevent cross- contamination of ready-to-eat foods during preparation and storage (storing raw and cooked foods separately).
- Cook foods thoroughly.
- Store foods at or below 4°C or at or above 60°C.
- Use foods from approved sources.

Is there anything special I need to know?

If you are infected with food poisoning and you are a food handler or provide services to others, particularly seniors or children, you should not go to work while you are having symptoms. Food handlers, health care providers and childcare staff should not work until they are symptom free for 24 hours or symptom free for 48 hours after completing use of anti-diarrheal medication. You should consult with your health care provider and employer to determine when it is safe for you to return to work. It is possible that even after you are feeling better you could still be shedding the organism in your stool. To prevent spreading the disease to people around you, always practice good hand washing and hygiene.

If you are suspecting that you ate a meal that has made you ill and others that shared the meal ill, you should:

- Call your local health unit to inform them of what you suspect. The investigator may request that you:
 - List all the foods you have eaten for a specific period,
 - Save any uneaten food that you suspect may have made you ill,
 - Submit a stool specimen to assist in identifying the “germ” that has made you ill.

For information call Infectious Diseases: ext. 8809.