



Food Poisoning At A Glance

Foodborne illness, commonly referred to as “food poisoning,” occurs when a person becomes sick after consuming contaminated food or beverages. Contamination can be physical, chemical, or biological. Biological contamination is caused by “germs” such as harmful bacteria, viruses, and even parasites. A foodborne illness outbreak occurs when two or more people become ill after consuming the same food or beverage.

The signs and symptoms of food poisoning

Symptoms can vary from mild to serious, which can last for a few hours to several days. Some common symptoms of food poisoning include:

- Diarrhea
- Vomiting
- Stomach cramps
- Nausea
- Fever

Risk factors for food poisoning

Everyone is at risk of getting food poisoning. However, there are some people who are at a higher risk of becoming sick:

- Children younger than 5
- Adults 65 and older
- Pregnant women
- Those with a weakened immune system

Did You Know?

- *Listeria monocytogenes (Lm)* is a life-threatening bacterium that may result in a disease called listeriosis. *Lm* is commonly found in foods such as unpasteurized milk, milk products, and deli meats.
- Listeriosis is especially dangerous for pregnant women and can cause serious complications such as premature delivery, stillbirth, and miscarriage.
- In newborns, listeriosis can cause blood infections and meningitis.

Common Food Poisoning Myths

MYTH	FACT
Food poisoning is always caused by the last meal consumed.	After consuming food contaminated with bacteria or other disease-causing pathogens, the onset of symptoms can range from 6 to 48 hours. There are even some bacteria that take up to two weeks to show symptoms.
You can tell if food is safe by how it looks or smells.	Food may smell fresh and appear safe and still contain harmful bacteria or other disease-causing pathogens.
Food prepared at home is always safer than food prepared at a restaurant.	Food poisoning can result from food consumed anywhere, not just from restaurants. We often think we use safe food-handling practices at home, but that may not be the case. A best practice is to educate yourself on food safety to ensure you are knowledgeable on safe food-handling practices.

What should you do if you think you have food poisoning?

- Visit your health care provider.
- Talk with your doctor about getting tested* to confirm food poisoning.

*Testing for food poisoning requires a stool sample for laboratory testing. These tests can determine which disease-causing agent is responsible for your illness.

What will the Texas Department of State Health Services (DSHS) do?

- DSHS tracks and reports cases of foodborne illness to determine if there is an outbreak.
- By getting tested for food poisoning, you provide the information our state epidemiologists need to conduct a traceback investigation. These investigations help find the source of the contamination and may prevent others from getting sick.

What can you do to help?

Once you begin to feel ill, remember and write down everything you ate in the week prior to getting sick.

- include restaurants, events, and parties you attended;
- collect grocery receipts you may have kept as this provides a list of foods you purchased and may have consumed;
- report your foodborne illness to your local health department, especially if you know of others who became ill; and
- visit your health care provider and get tested!

Visit these links for more information

- dshs.texas.gov/laboratoryservices/programs-laboratories/microbiology-unit/consumer-microbiology/what-causes-food-borne
- dshs.texas.gov/foodborneillness
- cdc.gov/food-safety/signssymptoms/index.html

If you believe you are experiencing a medical emergency, please call 911!



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