



## Foodborne Illness

With the recent media focus on contaminated tomatoes, many people are worried about foodborne illness.

### What is Foodborne illness?


Foodborne illness is another name for food poisoning. Foodborne illnesses are caused by eating contaminated food. The most common causes of food poisoning are bacteria and the toxins some bacteria make.



### How can foods be contaminated?

- Foods can be contaminated by one of the many kinds of germs (viruses, bacteria, parasites) that can make us sick.
- Foods can be contaminated at any time—on the farm, in the factory, in the store, or while they are being prepared at home or in a restaurant.

### How can I avoid getting sick?

 The recent media spotlight on contaminated tomatoes and, in 2006, on contaminated spinach has led many people to focus on farms and stores as sources of food contamination. However, contamination can also come from food that isn't handled safely at home. The Partnership for Food Safety Education recommends these four steps to help you safely prepare food and avoid getting sick—**Clean, Separate, Cook, & Chill**:

#### 1) Clean: Wash Hands and Surfaces Often

Germs can spread throughout the kitchen and get onto hands, cutting boards, utensils, counter tops and food. To stop the spread of germs, always:

- Wash your hands with warm water and soap for at least 20 seconds before and after handling food and after using the bathroom, changing diapers and handling pets.
- Wash your cutting boards, dishes, utensils, and counter tops with hot soapy water after preparing each food item and before you go on to the next food.



#### 2) Separate: Don't cross-contaminate!

Cross-contamination is one way bacteria can spread and make you sick. When you handle raw meat, poultry, seafood and eggs, keep these foods and their juices away from ready-to-eat foods. Always start with a clean scene -- wash hands with warm water and soap. Wash cutting boards, dishes, countertops and utensils with hot soapy water.

- Separate raw meat, poultry, seafood and eggs from other foods in your grocery cart, grocery bags, and your refrigerator
- Use one cutting board for fresh produce and a separate one for raw meat, poultry and seafood.
- Never place cooked food on a plate that previously held raw meat, poultry, seafood or eggs.



#### 3) Cook: Cook to proper temperature

Food is safely cooked when it reaches a high enough internal temperature to kill the harmful bacteria that cause foodborne illness.

- Use a food thermometer which measures the internal temperature of cooked meat, poultry and egg dishes, to make sure that the food is cooked to a safe internal temperature of 165°F (180°F for whole poultry).



#### 4) Chill: Refrigerate right away

Refrigerate foods quickly because cold temperatures slow the growth of most harmful bacteria, and keep foods cold. Keeping the refrigerator at 40°F or below is one of the best ways to reduce the risk of foodborne illness. The freezer temperature should be 0°F or below.

- Refrigerate or freeze meat, poultry, eggs and other perishables as soon as you get them home from the store.
- Never let raw meat, poultry, eggs, cooked food or cut fresh fruits or vegetables sit at room temperature more than two hours before putting them in the refrigerator or freezer (one hour when it's hot out—above 90°F).
- Never defrost food at room temperature. Food must be kept at a safe temperature during thawing. There are three safe ways to defrost food: in the refrigerator, in cold water, and in the microwave. Cook foods thawed in cold water or in the microwave immediately.

### What can I do if I get sick?

- Most foodborne illnesses go away on their own
- If you are vomiting or have diarrhea, replace lost fluids and electrolytes (salts) with oral rehydration solutions (like Pedialyte). Don't use sports drinks (like Gatorade) since these don't have the right balance of electrolytes.
- Contact your doctor if you:
  - are pregnant or immune compromised (e.g. a transplant patient)
  - have a high fever (over 101.5 F)
  - are vomiting blood or having bloody bowel movements
  - can't keep liquids down
  - have been vomiting or had diarrhea for more than 3 days
  - have signs of severe dehydration (such as dry mouth, peeing less than usual, dizziness, or rapid breathing or heart rate)

### Where can I learn more about foodborne illness?

**For a complete list of food safety tips, visit the Fight Bac Website:** You will find information about food safety and foodborne illness at: <http://www.fightbac.org/index.php>

**The CDC's Foodborne Illness Website:** For a list of common foodborne illnesses and their symptoms, visit [http://www.cdc.gov/ncidod/dbmd/diseaseinfo/foodborneinfections\\_g.htm](http://www.cdc.gov/ncidod/dbmd/diseaseinfo/foodborneinfections_g.htm)



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