



Food Poisoning Fact Sheet

What is food poisoning?

Common foods may sometimes be poisoned by bacteria (germs). These germs cannot be seen by the human eye alone. Under certain circumstances, these germs can cause food poisoning. Poisonous foods may not smell or taste bad. Although most food poisoning will usually go away in 24 hours – some forms can be fatal.

What are symptoms of food poisoning?

Many different bacteria can cause food poisoning. Most of the symptoms caused by food poisoning are the same as those caused by stomach viruses. It is impossible to know the difference between food poisoning and a stomach virus without a stool culture. Some of the most common bacteria that cause food poisoning are salmonella, C. perfringens, staphylococcus and E. Coli. Symptoms can include: headache, fatigue, nausea, vomiting, diarrhea, dehydration, fever and abdominal pain. Food poisoning can also cause death, especially in high-risk

groups such as the elderly, infants or individuals with an immune deficiency.

C. Botulinum is another bacteria that can cause food poisoning. Botulism is more common in improperly prepared home canned foods such as green beans. It is more rare, but often fatal. Symptoms include double vision, inability to move, trouble talking, difficulty swallowing, drooping eyelids, dry/sore throat.

What food can cause food poisoning?

The most common sources of poisoned food are meats, chicken, dairy products (milk, cheese, eggs, mayonnaise), home canned food (botulism), pure raw honey (infant botulism). Infants under one year old should not eat honey. Fish and shellfish can also cause food poisoning. Symptoms and treatment are different.

What do I do if I think I or someone else might have food poisoning?

Call the Oklahoma Poison Control Center. The Oklahoma Poison Control Center can help provide more information about when to see a doctor. The main concern is usually from

dehydration or body fluid loss from vomiting and diarrhea. It is very easy for a child to become dehydrated. If food poisoning is suspected, it is important to drink plenty of fluids, especially water. Do not take anything to stop the vomiting or diarrhea unless recommended by a doctor. Medications for these symptoms can actually prolong them.

When do I see a doctor?

If you see blood in the vomit or stool, high fever (101° F), inability to keep fluids down and symptoms that last longer than a day, you should see a doctor. Parents of pediatric patients with fever and vomiting should contact their physician. Severity of symptoms varies with age and health. Elderly people and young infants with the same symptoms as healthy young adults can actually be much sicker.



How do I avoid food poisoning?

Food safety can help you prevent food poisoning.

Shopping

- Buy meats that are cold and tightly wrapped. Check eggs – do not buy cartons with cracked or broken eggs.
- Avoid cans with bulges, leaks or dents. Make sure lids and seals are not broken. If a product looks or smells bad – DO NOT taste it.
- Put refrigerated/frozen foods in your grocery cart last so they do not warm up while you shop.
- Keep meat and chicken away from other foods in your cart. Place these foods in plastic bags to keep juices from leaking out.
- If you travel more than one hour to get home – bring a cooler for food that could spoil. Make the store the last stop before heading home.

Storing

- Set your refrigerator at 40° F or colder and your freezer at 0° F or colder.
- Put meat, chicken and dairy products in the refrigerator right away after returning from the grocery store.

- If you are not going to use meats within a few days, place them in the freezer. Wrap meats tightly in aluminum foil or freezer wrap.
- Use fresh or thawed meats as soon as possible.

Preparing

- Defrost foods in the refrigerator. If you must thaw in a hurry, do so in a watertight plastic bag and put in cool water. Never thaw food uncovered on a kitchen counter at room temperature. Cook food right away after thawing.
- Keep hands, utensils, cutting boards and sinks clean. Bacteria are easily spread by contaminated surfaces.
- Clean cutting boards often with a bleach solution. Mix 2 teaspoonfuls of household bleach and 1 quart of warm water. Make sure to label the container. Use the mixture to clean the boards then rinse them under cool running water. Plastic cutting boards are the best for meats. Do not use the same board to cut bread, produce or cooked meats.

- Always wash hands well with soapy water before, during and after preparing foods.
- Do not place foods on the same plate or surface that held raw meat or chicken. Wash the surface and utensils that have touched meat or chicken before using them to prepare other foods.
- Thoroughly cook meat, chicken and fish.

Serving

- Never leave cooked foods at room temperature for longer than two hours; if the room is warm, no longer than one hour.
- Put leftovers in the refrigerator right away. Do not wait for foods to cool down first.
- To re-heat leftovers, cover and heat to 165 F. Use leftovers within 3-4 days.

If you suspect food is spoiled -
DO NOT taste or eat it!
When in doubt, throw it out!

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**For questions or for more information, please call the Oklahoma Poison Control Center
1-800-222-1222 or
OKC Area (405) 271-5454**