I might have a foodborne illness, now what?

In otherwise healthy people, most foodborne illnesses go away within a couple of days without medical attention.

People at risk (or who have severe or long-lasting symptoms) should go to the doctor.

Go to the doctor if you have severe dehydration (loss of water), bloody or loose, gray diarrhea, a fever that lasts more than 2 days, numbness, or difficulty breathing. A stool or blood sample is usually required to find out what is making you sick.

Wash your hands with soap—many foodborne illnesses can be spread to other people if you don't wash your hands carefully.

Prevent dehydration–drink plenty of fluids.

Call your local health department if the food that you think made you sick was served at a large gathering, or is from a restaurant or other public food facility, like a grocery store.

The number for the health department in Benton and Franklin Counties is: (509) 460-4205.

Your last meal was probably not what made you sick—your doctor and the health department will need to know the food you ate and your activities for the past 3 days.

This 72-hour history includes:

- Every meal, snack, and drink
- Travel
- Visitors
- Meetings
- Shopping
- Contact with animals
- Events

How can I prevent foodborne illnesses?

- ☑ **Wash**—Wash your hands before eating or handling food, and after handling raw meat, or using the bathroom.
- ☑ **Clean**—Wash utensils, cutting boards, and counters before and after food preparation, especially after raw meat.
- ☑ **Separate**—Keep raw meats and their juices away from other foods at all times--in the shopping cart, in the refrigerator, in the ice chest, everywhere.
- ☑ **Rinse**—Rinse and scrub all fruits and vegetables before slicing, peeling, or eating.
- ☑ **Cook**—Cook foods to the proper temperature. Use a thermometer to check doneness.
- ☑ **Cool**—Chill leftovers as fast as possible--Cut large pieces of meat into smaller chunks, put thick foods (like beans) into shallow pans, and keep them uncovered in the refrigerator until the food is cool.
- ☑ **Ask**—Know your source, and only purchase foods from reputable companies. Ask to see the health permit (it should be posted and current). If prepared food is colder or warmer than it should be, ask for a replacement meal.

Where can I go for more answers?

Benton-Franklin Health District
7102 W. Okanogan Pl.
Kennewick, WA 99336 (509) 460-4205
www.bfhd.wa.gov

Other brochures available:
"Handwashing"
"Salmonella"

For more information:
USDA Meat and Poultry 1(800) 535-4555
www.usda.gov

FDA Food Information Line 1(800) FDA-4010
www.fda.gov

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Do I have a Foodborne Illness?

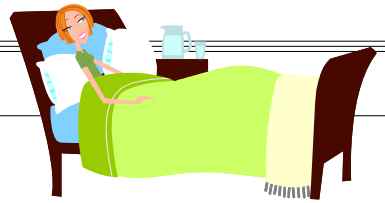
Food Safety Series

www.bfhd.wa.gov

PUBLIC HEALTH
Prevent • Promote • Protect
BENTON-FRANKLIN HEALTH DISTRICT

Today's Specials
Salmonella Salad
E. coli Burger
Hepatitis A Oysters
Shigella Finger Foods
Giardia Iced Tea

Although the United States has one of the safest food supplies in the world, 76 million Americans get sick, 325,000 go to the hospital, and 5000 die each year from a foodborne illness (Centers for Disease Control). This brochure will help you figure out whether you have a foodborne illness, what to do if think you have one, how to prevent foodborne illnesses in the future, and where to go for more information.



A foodborne illness

is any illness caused by consuming contaminated food or water. Foodborne illnesses are usually caused by things you cannot see, smell or taste—bacteria, viruses, parasites or chemicals. Most foodborne illnesses don't last long (1-3 days), go away on their own and are not life-threatening, but some foodborne illnesses can be deadly.

Symptoms

Most of the things that cause foodborne illnesses affect the digestive tract, and symptoms generally include nausea, stomach cramps, diarrhea and vomiting.

Although anyone can have a foodborne illness, more severe symptoms can occur in **people that are at highest risk:**

- **babies and children,**
- **senior citizens,**
- **pregnant women, and those with long-term health problems like cancer, AIDS, diabetes, or on antibiotics.**

Severe symptoms include:

- Bloody diarrhea
- Fever
- Headache
- Blurred vision
- Chest pain
- Paralysis
- Jaundice (yellowing of the skin and eyes)

The time between eating the contaminated food and showing symptoms, called the incubation period, can range from a few minutes to several weeks, but symptoms are usually observed within 48 hours.

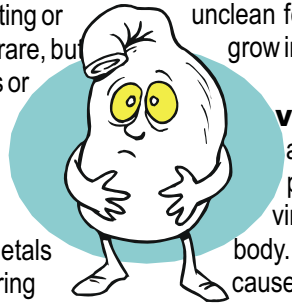
Food intoxication can be broken into two groups:

Food Intoxication

is also called food poisoning. The contaminant is a toxin or poison. The incubation time is generally short—symptoms are noticed within several minutes to a few hours.

Toxin and poison sources include:

bacteria—Several bacteria (for example: *Staphylococcus aureus, Bacillus cereus*) can grow on food at room temperature and produce toxins that can make people sick. Many of these toxins are not destroyed by heat, and can make you sick *even after* the food is cooked. Most of the toxins cause vomiting or diarrhea, but the *Clostridium botulinum* toxin (rare, but sometimes found in improperly-canned foods or other foods with reduced oxygen levels) can cause paralysis and death in individuals if not treated.



metals—Zinc, cadmium, lead and other metals from cooking utensils can leach into food during food preparation and storage.

chemicals—Pesticides, cleaners, and other mixtures can get into food when they are improperly used or stored.

food toxins—Some foods, like many species of mushrooms, fish and shellfish are toxic and are not safe to eat. Other foods, like clams, mussels, tuna or salmon, can become toxic due to improper harvesting.

Food Infection

is a foodborne illness that requires the growth of an organism to make you sick. Symptoms of a food infection are generally noticed after 12-48 hours, but sometimes aren't noticed for weeks.

Infections include:

bacterial—Many bacteria (including *Salmonella enteritidis, Clostridium perfringens, Escherichia coli, Listeria monocytogenes*) can be present on foods when grown at home or bought from the store. These, and other, bacteria can also be spread by unclean food workers. If you are at risk, they can grow inside your intestines to make you sick.

viral—For example, Hepatitis A, rotavirus, and Norovirus can be spread from infected people through food or surfaces. The viruses multiply once they are inside your body. Many viruses affect the liver, and can cause jaundice—the yellowing of the skin and eyes.

parasitic—Parasites, like the roundworm (sometimes found in undercooked meat) *Trichinella spiralis,* or the protozoan (sometimes found in untreated water) *Giardia lamblia,* use your intestines for a place to live and dine. Symptoms sometimes include weight loss and gray, watery diarrhea.