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2008

Food – Borne Illness

FOOD SAFETY BEGINS AT HOME

Do you think your home is the least likely place for food contamination to occur? According to a report from the Institute of Food Technologists, small outbreaks in homes account for most of the cases of food-borne illness in the United States. Common factors causing food-borne illness in the home are:

- inadequate cooking
- improper cooling
- food obtained from unsafe sources
- too much time between cooking and eating
- contamination from unwashed hands
- discard food if temperature of food has risen above 41° F for more than 2 hours
- keep hot food hot and cold foods cold.

Food-borne illnesses can range from mild, to severe, to life threatening. Symptoms include diarrhea, abdominal pain, nausea, and vomiting. Depending on the cause, fever, headache, or other symptoms may also be present. Symptoms may begin as soon as 30 minutes after eating, but usually appear after 8 hours to 3 days, and may take as long as a week. The duration of the illness is usually from 1 to 4 days.

**Food and Nutrition Services
can assist in providing
nutrition information.
Call 703-813-4800 and
ask for a Registered Dietitian.**

HANDWASHING IS ONE OF THE **“MOST IMPORTANT MEANS OF PREVENTING THE SPREAD OF INFECTION”** ACCORDING TO THE CENTRE FOR DISEASE CONTROL AND PREVENTION (CDC).

When hand washing is a must:

- after going to the bathroom
- after playing with pets
- before eating
- before and after preparing or serving food
- after playing outdoors
- after touching public surfaces such as door knobs
- after coughing or sneezing.



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2006

THE CULPRITS: BACTERIA

Campylobacter jejuni is present in all poultry and some meats. This is the most common cause of illness. Fortunately, illness is generally mild and doesn't occur in large outbreaks, but is becoming more resistant to antibiotics.

Salmonella is the second most common cause of illness and usually strikes many people at one time. It is found in poultry, eggs, meat, and milk.

Shigella is the third most common bacteria. It comes from humans and flies that have access to human waste. Food is contaminated by improper handling.

E. Coli 0154:H7 is found mainly in beef, produce water or any other food where cattle manure is used as fertilizer. While not common, it has been known to cause kidney damage and even death.

Listeria causes more deaths than the other types of bacteria. The illness is characterized by meningitis. It is found in raw meat, poultry, seafood, and soil-grown vegetables, as well as in some ready-to-eat-foods. It will grow on wet floors, in drains and on sponges. It is easily killed by thorough cooking.

Clostridium botulinum grows in improperly canned, low acid foods. This illness attacks the nervous system and often causes death. Never taste food from a swollen can or if the food is foamy or foul smelling.

Staphylococcus is a common form of illness and usually strikes quickly. This illness is generally the result of direct contamination by

the food handler, after cooking, followed by improper holding and storage.

Clostridium perfringens is suspected of causing many mild cases of food-borne illness. It can be found on any food and is also passed along by the food handler.

Bacillus cereus is found in grains, rice, flour, and spices. Cooked, moist grains, such as oatmeal or rice, should be kept refrigerated.

THE CULPRITS: PARASITES, VIRUSES, AND FUNGI

Cyclospora has recently contaminated raspberries and basil. It is endemic in third world countries. The illness is characterized by severe fatigue, but is usually successfully treated in a week. It is best to avoid imported foods linked to this parasite.

Hepatitis A is a virus found in the human intestinal and urinary tract and contaminated water. It is passed directly to food from a contaminated person and can live on any food. Individuals who contract this disease may run a fever, headache, nausea, fatigue, stomach ache and later jaundice. Symptoms may be seen 10 days to two months after consuming the contaminated food or water.

Molds will grow on almost any food. They may cause allergic reactions or illness. Molds often grow on bruised areas of food.

Trichinella is still present in some pork. This parasite is killed through cooking. This illness is characterized by swelling around the eyes and muscular stiffness.