



NEWS

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Facts about Food Poisoning from the Montgomery County Health Department
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Norristown, PA (September 17, 2015) – September is National Food Safety Education Month. Check out these facts about food poisoning from the Montgomery County Health Department.

What Is Foodborne Illness (Disease, Infection)?

Food poisoning (also known as foodborne illness) is any illness that results from eating contaminated food. Foodborne illness is a common and costly, yet preventable, public health problem. Each year, one in six Americans get sick from contaminated foods or beverages; 3,000 die. Salmonella, a bacterium that commonly causes foodborne illnesses, results in more hospitalizations and deaths than any other bacteria found in food and incurs \$365 million in direct medical costs every year. Many different disease-causing microbes, or pathogens, can contaminate foods, so there are many different foodborne infections. In addition, poisonous chemicals, or other harmful substances, can also cause foodborne diseases if they are present in food. Different food-borne illnesses have different symptoms. The microbe, or toxin, enters the body through the gastrointestinal tract, and often causes the first symptoms including nausea, vomiting, abdominal cramps, and diarrhea.

Causes

Harmful bacteria are the most common cause of food poisoning, but there are many other causes, including the following:

- Bacteria and Viruses
- Molds, Toxins, and Contaminants
- Parasites
- Allergens

Key Principles of Food Hygiene

In theory, food borne illnesses are 100% preventable. The five key principles of food hygiene, according to the World Health Organization (WHO), are:

1. Separate raw and cooked foods to prevent contaminating the cooked foods
2. Cook foods for the appropriate length of time and at the appropriate temperature to kill pathogens
3. Store your food at the proper temperature
4. Use safe/clean water and raw materials
5. Prevent contaminating food with pathogens spreading from people, pets, and pests

Long-Term Effects

One in six Americans will get sick from food poisoning this year. Most of them will recover without any lasting effects from their illness. For some, however, the effects can be devastating and even deadly. Serious long-term effects associated with several common types of food poisoning include: kidney failure, chronic arthritis, brain and nerve damage, and death.

Who's At Risk?

Certain groups of people are more susceptible to foodborne illness. This means that they are more likely to get sick from contaminated food and, if they do get sick, the effects are much more serious. These groups include: pregnant women, older adults, and persons with chronic illnesses.

What Is The Montgomery County Health Department Doing About Food-Related Diseases?

The Montgomery County Health Department (MCHD) conducts at least two inspections per year at most of the county's 3,800 food facilities. The facilities that get inspected once a year are considered low risk and sell prepackaged foods, food that does not require any kind of food prep.

Environmental Health Specialists also respond to food related complaints. Some examples of complaints MCHD staff would investigate are cleanliness issues, vector issues, illness complaints, and foodborne disease outbreak investigations. As part of the inspection MCHD staff educate the facility owners during the process by answering questions, explaining the violations, and providing educational materials as necessary. Per code MCHD also requires each licensed facility to have a person in charge successfully completed a course in food-handling. A certified food safety manager (CFSM) must be a full time employee and designated as the certified food safety manager at only one food facility location within Montgomery County. The CFSM is required to reapply for certification every five years. The public food service facility should not be without the services of a CFSM who has a current and valid certification with MCHD.

Residents may visit the [Food Establishment Inspection Search](#) for information about Montgomery County restaurant inspections.

Where can I get more information on food safety?

- www.foodsafety.gov
- www.cdc.gov/foodsafety
- <https://healthymeals.nal.usda.gov/features-month/september/national-food-safety-education-month>