Food Safety Fact Sheet

Foodborne illnesses are commonly caused by microorganisms (germs) present in food

Many different germs can cause foodborne illnesses, including bacteria, viruses, fungi, and parasites. Foodborne illnesses may also be caused by the toxins (poisons) that these germs make. Almost any food can become contaminated under the right conditions; however, some foods are more likely to contain harmful germs, including:

- Raw or undercooked poultry, meat, seafood, or eggs
- Raw or undercooked sprouts
- Unwashed fruits and vegetables
- Unpasteurized milk, juice, cider, or soft cheese
- Raw dough or batter made with uncooked flour

Symptoms of foodborne illness vary

The symptoms you experience and how quickly you feel sick after consuming a contaminated product can change depending on the type of germ or toxin you were exposed to. However, common symptoms include:

- Nausea and vomiting
- Diarrhea
- Abdominal pain or cramps
- Fever or chills

Many foodborne illnesses occur because of the way food is handled and prepared

You can help prevent these illnesses by not giving harmful germs a chance to multiply and contaminate foods. If you suspect that you have handled or prepared any food incorrectly, you should throw it away or consult a food safety information service before serving or eating it.

Tips for keeping food safe:

Clean hands, surfaces, and foods:

- Wash your hands with soap and warm water before, during, and after preparing food and before eating.
- Wash utensils, cutting boards, and countertops with hot, soapy water after preparing each food item.
- Rinse fresh fruit and vegetables under running water.

Separate and handle foods safely to avoid cross-contamination:

- Keep raw meats, poultry, and seafood (and their drippings) away from other foods when grocery shopping.
- Thaw raw meats, poultry, and seafood on a plate in the refrigerator on the lowest shelf possible, and away from other foods. Never thaw these foods on the counter because germs can multiply quickly at room temperature.
- Store raw meat, poultry, and seafood in sealed containers or wrap securely to contain drippings or juices.
- Use one cutting board or plate for raw meat, poultry, and seafood, and a separate cutting board or plate for produce, bread, and other foods that won't be cooked. Wash cutting boards after preparing each food item.
- You do not need to wash raw chicken. It is ready to cook straight out of the package. Washing can spread germs to other foods, the sink, and the counter, and make you sick.

Cook foods thoroughly:

- Cook meat, poultry, shellfish, and eggs to a temperature high enough to kill the germs that can make you sick.
- Use a food thermometer to ensure that food is thoroughly cooked. You can't tell if food is safely cooked by checking its color and texture.
- Microwave food thoroughly. Follow recommended cooking and standing times. Letting food sit for a few minutes after microwaving allows cold spots to absorb heat from hotter areas and cook more completely.
- Do not taste or eat raw, rare, or even pink poultry or ground meats.
- Do not eat raw shellfish, such as oysters or clams, even if it is marinated.
- Avoid eating foods that contain raw or undercooked eggs, like some Caesar salad dressings.

Store foods properly:

- Refrigerate and freeze perishable foods right away.
- Keep hot foods hot and cold foods cold after they are prepared.
- Do not leave perishable food at room temperature for longer than two hours. Refrigerate or freeze leftovers in shallow containers or tightly wrapped bags.