

Prevention of Food and Water Borne Illness

Food and water borne illness, often referred to as food poisoning, is generally caused by eating or drinking food or beverages contaminated by bacteria, parasites or viruses. These organisms are passed in the feces of animals and infected people. Symptoms of food or water borne illness are gastrointestinal, for example diarrhea and stomach cramps. You can also get sick from swimming in contaminated water or from close contact with someone else who is ill.

Certain groups are at increased risk of developing serious complications. These include: pregnant women, young children, seniors, anyone with an underlying medical condition, and anyone with a weakened immune system such as those on chemotherapy.

There are several ways to prevent these illnesses:

Use good environmental management. Flush or discard any stool in the toilet and clean surrounding area using hot water and detergent. A chlorine-based disinfectant is recommended.

Practice good personal hygiene. Frequent and careful hand washing is important among all age groups. Hand washing of children should be supervised. Wash hands thoroughly with soap and water for at least 20 seconds, rubbing hands together vigorously and scrubbing all surfaces.

- Wash hands thoroughly after using the toilet, changing a diaper or cleaning up a child who has used the toilet, and before and after tending to someone who is ill with diarrhea.
- Wash hands after handling animals, contact with animal quarters, cleaning up animal feces, or gardening.
- Wash hands before and after preparing food or eating.

Take food safety precautions to learn about the fundamentals of food safety so that you can protect yourself, your friends, family and people in your community.

- Wash and/or peel all raw vegetables and fruits before eating.
- Drink and eat only pasteurized dairy products (milk, cheese, yogurt and ice cream) and juices.
- Thoroughly cook all meats (meat, poultry and seafood). For example, ground beef should be cooked to an internal temperature of 71°C/160°F.
- Wash hands, kitchen work surfaces and utensils after contact with raw meat or poultry.
- Wash hands before handling food and between handling different food items.
- Prevent contact of cooked foods with raw foods (i.e., raw meat, and poultry).
- Clean and sanitize all utensils, equipment and surfaces (cutting boards, work counters, etc.) before and after each use. Be sure to use hot water and detergent to clean, then rinse with hot water. Sanitize food contact surfaces with a sanitizing solution
- Avoid preparing food for others while you have symptoms and for 48 hours after you recover.

Drink properly treated water. Water from private water supplies should be routinely tested twice a year for Total Coliform and E.coli. Inorganic analysis on private water supplies should preferably be done every two to three years

- Do not swallow water while swimming in swimming pools, hot tubs or interactive fountains, lakes, rivers, springs, ponds, streams or the ocean.
- Do not drink untreated water from lakes, rivers, springs, ponds, streams, or shallow wells.
- Do not drink tap water or use ice while travelling to a high-risk destination unless the water source has been properly treated.