

FOOD POISONING FACT SHEET

What is Food Poisoning?

Each year thousands of people suffer with food poisoning. Eating or drinking contaminated food causes food poisoning. The food may be contaminated with bacteria, viruses or toxins. The most commonly reported types of food poisoning in this country are caused by Campylobacter and Salmonella bacteria. The foods most often associated with food poisoning are meat, poultry, untreated milk, dairy products, raw eggs, shellfish and rice. Unfortunately contaminated food looks tastes and smells normal so you cannot tell the food will make you ill just by looking at it.

What are the Symptoms?

Symptoms vary according to the cause but may include all or some of the following:

- Tiredness
- fever
- nausea
- abdominal pain
- Headache
- Vomiting
- diarrhoea
- aching muscles

The illness may last between 1 and 7 days but can be up to 21 days or more. You can also carry the organism in your gut for some time after your symptoms have stopped.

Where does Food Poisoning come from?

You find food poisoning organisms in the gut of humans, wild and domestic animals including poultry, cattle, rodents and pets such as cats and dogs.

How is Food Poisoning Spread?

Food poisoning can be spread in many ways:

- by eating contaminated food that is undercooked or raw such as meat, poultry or eggs
- by eating cooked or ready to eat foods that have been in contact with contaminated food, surfaces, equipment or utensils
- by an infected person through inadequate hand washing after using the WC or after touching animals or pets

What is the Incubation Period?

This is the time from eating the infected food to becoming ill and varies for different types of food poisoning, ranging between 2 hours and several weeks.

How will I know if I have food poisoning?

If you think you are suffering from food poisoning, it is recommended you visit your doctor who may arrange some tests and will give you some advice.

How can I prevent Food Poisoning?

- Buy food from reputable sources. Check the use by or best before dates.
- Buy refrigerated and frozen foods last and always take them straight home. Use a cool bag to help keep them cold.
- Make sure your refrigerator and freezer are cold enough for safe food storage. Buy a thermometer for your fridge and aim to keep the temperature below 5°C.
- Be careful to keep juices or drippings from raw meat, poultry, raw seafood or raw eggs from contaminating other foods. Thoroughly wash knives, chopping boards, surfaces and hands immediately after handling raw foods. Never use the same knife or chopping board for raw and ready to eat foods without thoroughly washing them between uses.
- Cook food thoroughly especially poultry. Thorough cooking kills most harmful bacteria, which could cause food poisoning. Cook meat products such as burgers and sausages until the juices run clear and there are no pink bits inside.
- Do not use raw eggs in ready to eat dishes such as mayonnaise, mousse, ice cream or egg drinks. Also avoid eating undercooked eggs (runny yolks) or soft meringues. Keep your eggs in the fridge.
- Do not drink unpasteurised milk or eat unpasteurised dairy products.
- Keep your kitchen clean. Wash worktops and utensils often with hot water and detergent or use a bactericidal cleaner. Bleach, disinfect or change kitchen cloths regularly.
- Wash your hands with hot water and soap and thoroughly dry them after going to the toilet, touching animals or changing nappies. Also always wash your hands before you start preparing food and after handling raw meat or vegetables.
- Keep pets away from food, dishes and worktops.

How long should I stay of Work or school?

- Usually you can return to work once you are symptom free and feel well enough.
- If you are working with food, or with vulnerable groups of people such as the young, the elderly or those in poor health, you must tell your employer about your illness and not return to work until you have been symptom free for 48 hours.
- Children should not attend playgroups, childminders or nursery school until they have been symptom free for 48 hours.

**For further information please contact the London Borough of Merton, Environmental Health & Trading Standards, Civic Centre, London Road, Morden, SM4 5DX
Tel: 020 8545 3024**