



Indiana State Department of Health

Epidemiology Resource Center

Quick Facts

About...Staphylococcal Food Poisoning

What is Staphylococcal food poisoning?

Staphylococcal (staff-uh-low-COCK-ull) food poisoning is caused by a toxin (poison) made by Staphylococcal bacteria, usually *Staphylococcus aureus*. These germs are found on the skin, and in the nose, mouth, and throat of many healthy people. Usually it causes no illness in these healthy people unless it is spread to food.

What are the symptoms of Staphylococcal Food Poisoning?

- Diarrhea
- Vomiting
- Nausea
- Cramps
- Weakness

Symptoms start quickly within 1-6 hours after eating contaminated food. The illness goes away on its own, usually within a day.

How is Staphylococcal food poisoning spread?

You can get Staphylococcal food poisoning by eating food contaminated with Staphylococcal bacteria. Food may become contaminated when someone handles it with bare hands, especially after touching the face or mouth. If food is not cooked completely or properly kept hot or cold, the bacteria can grow and produce toxin in the food. Foods usually involved include ham, poultry, filled pastries, custard, egg salad and potato salad. It can also be found in unpasteurized milk and cheese products. Staphylococcal food poisoning is NOT spread from person-to-person.

Who is at risk for getting Staphylococcal food poisoning?

Anyone can become ill, but young children, older adults, pregnant women, and people with poor immune systems (such as patients on cancer drugs and with organ transplants) are at high risk for illness.

How do I know if I have Staphylococcal food poisoning?

Anyone having diarrhea longer than 24 hours should go to the doctor. The illness can be diagnosed by symptoms and quick onset, but your doctor may order tests to rule out other conditions.

How is Staphylococcal food poisoning treated?

There is no vaccine or medicine to treat food poisoning. Treatment is based on relieving symptoms. People with diarrhea and vomiting should drink plenty of fluids to avoid dehydration.

How is Staphylococcal food poisoning prevented?

- Wash hands with soap and water before preparing food. If you touch your face while preparing food, wash your hands before handling food again.
- Keep kitchens and food-serving areas clean.
- Keep hot foods hot (at or above 140°F) and cold foods cold (at or below 41°F).
- Cool cooked foods as soon as possible using shallow, uncovered containers or covered containers vented to allow heat to escape.
- Cool and reheat foods only once.
- Exclude food handlers with nose, eye or exposed infections, such as a boil or cut on the hands, from food preparation and handling.
- Touch food with bare hands as little as possible. Do not handle food with bare hands after touching your face or if you have open sores on your hands.

All information presented is intended for public use. For more information, please refer to: <http://www.cdc.gov/nczved/divisions/dfbmd/diseases/staphylococcal/>.

Food and Drug Administration, Food Facts for Consumers:
<http://www.fda.gov/Food/ResourcesForYou/Consumers/ucm077286.htm>

This page was last reviewed July 1, 2016.