



What is Foodborne Illness?

Foodborne illness results from eating food or drinking water contaminated with disease-causing microorganisms (such as *salmonella*), harmful chemicals or toxins. Although unsafe, the food may actually look, taste and smell 'normal'.

The usual symptoms of foodborne illness can include nausea, stomach pain, diarrhoea and/or vomiting (gastroenteritis). Symptoms generally last for less than a week. In rare cases, foodborne illness can result in long-term health problems and even death.

Symptoms can occur within 30 minutes of eating contaminated food but usually take much longer to appear (i.e. hours or even days).

Some people have a higher chance of contracting foodborne illness than others and may also suffer more severely. These people include young children, the elderly, pregnant women and people already sick (e.g. cancer and HIV/AIDS patients).

If you think you have contracted a foodborne illness you should:

- seek medical attention for advice and treatment
- drink more fluid than you normally would to replace any losses
- tell your doctor if you think your illness is related to food you have eaten.

Some cases of foodborne illness are sporadic, meaning only one person becomes ill and it

may be difficult to know what the cause is. In other instances, outbreaks can occur where many people become ill after sharing a single food source. If you have contracted a foodborne illness, consider whether others around you are also ill and any common food or drink that you had.

Remember the food responsible for your illness is usually not the last thing you ate; it is important to consider all foods consumed within at least three days of becoming ill. Also, there are other (non-food) sources of gastroenteritis such as exposure to contaminated water while swimming, contact with animals or contact with other people that were sick with gastroenteritis.

Several bacteria, viruses and parasites cause foodborne illness as well as chemicals and toxins. The more common causes are [campylobacter](#), [salmonella](#) and [norovirus](#). Other causes include *E. coli*, [giardia](#), [hepatitis A virus](#), [listeria](#), rotavirus and [shigella](#) (see www.dhhs.tas.gov.au/peh/infectious_diseases)

For further information and advice call the Public Health Hotline on Freecall 1800 671 738 or email pop.health@dhhs.tas.gov.au

Food safety – Public and Environmental Health

www.dhhs.tas.gov.au/peh/food_safety

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