

FOODBORNE ILLNESSES AND OUTBREAKS

en Español

Foodborne illnesses (sometimes called “food poisoning”) are caused by eating or drinking something that is contaminated with germs (such as bacteria, viruses, or parasites) or chemicals (such as toxins or metals) that can make people sick. Many foodborne illnesses can cause sudden symptoms like upset stomach, diarrhea, and vomiting, but most people get better in a few days without treatment. Some foodborne illnesses can cause other serious symptoms, resulting in hospitalization, long-term health problems, or even death.



The [U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention \(CDC\)](#) has estimated that every year in the United States:

- 48 million (or 1 in 6) people get sick from a foodborne illness
- 128,000 people are hospitalized because of a foodborne illness
- 3,000 people die from a foodborne illness

[**Learn more about recent multistate foodborne outbreaks**](#)

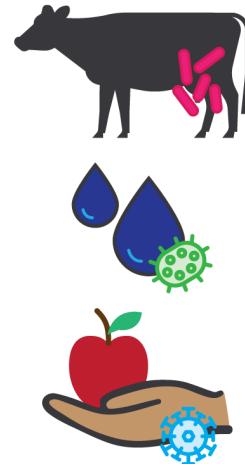
Contaminated Food & Drinks

The things we eat and drink can become contaminated in many different ways. Germs can get into food when the food is being grown or made, when the food is transported or distributed, and even when the food is prepared at a restaurant or in your home.

Germs can contaminate food and drinks if:

- Infected animals are used to produce meat or dairy products
- Contaminated water is used to grow or wash food
- People who are infected prepare or serve food to others

Germs can then multiply and produce toxins, especially when food and drinks are not refrigerated or stored properly.

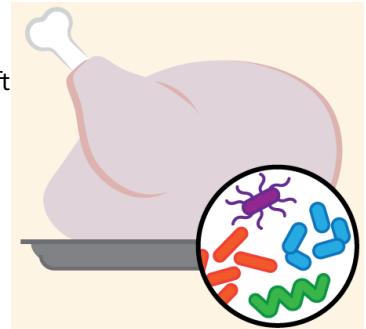


[**Learn more about the food production chain and how food gets contaminated**](#)

Some types of food and drinks are more likely than others to be contaminated with germs and make people sick.

These include:

- **Raw or undercooked meat, poultry, and seafood** (including beef, chicken, and oysters)
- **Raw or unpasteurized milk, dairy products, and juice** (including soft cheeses, ice cream, and apple cider)
- **Raw or undercooked eggs**
- **Fresh fruits and vegetables** (including sprouts, leafy greens, and unwashed produce)
- **Raw flour** (such as flour that is in raw cookie dough)



When food and drinks are not cooked properly or pasteurized, any germs inside are still alive and can make you sick when you eat or drink them.

What can I do to protect my family and myself from foodborne illness?

Anyone can get a foodborne illness, but certain groups of people are more likely to get very sick if they eat or drink something that is contaminated:

- People who are pregnant
- Children under the age of 5 years
- Adults aged 65 years and older
- People with certain medical conditions that weaken the immune system (such as diabetes or cancer)

People in these groups must be especially careful to avoid and prevent foodborne illness.

Foodborne Illness Prevention

You can help prevent foodborne illness by safely handling and cooking food before you eat or serve it. Learn the four steps of food safety:

1. Clean:

- Wash your hands and the surfaces where you prepare food with soap and water.

2. Separate:

- Keep raw meat, poultry, seafood, and eggs away from ready-to-eat food that won't be cooked.

3. Cook:

- Heat food to the right temperature to kill any germs that can make you sick.

4. Chill:

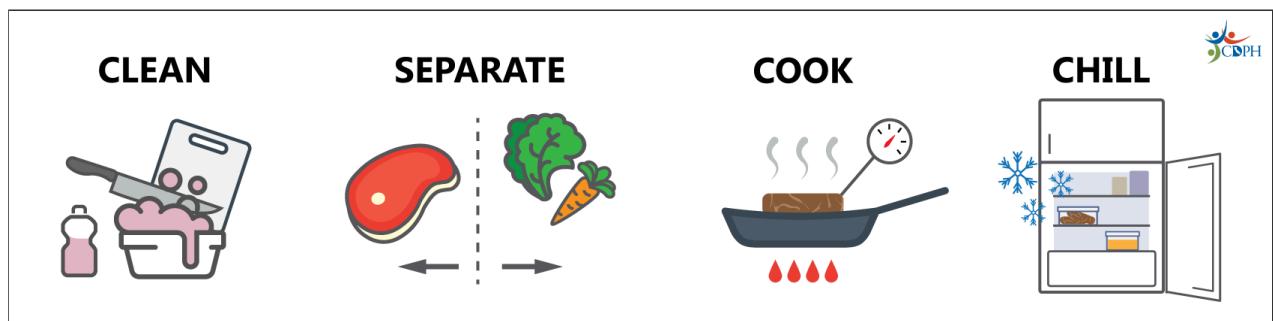
- Refrigerate food right away to prevent germs from growing in your food.

When to See a Doctor

See a doctor or healthcare provider if you have severe symptoms, especially symptoms that last for more than 3 days:

- Bloody diarrhea
- High fever (over 102°F)
- Frequent vomiting
- Dehydration

If you have any questions or concerns about foodborne illness, talk to a healthcare provider.



What are foodborne outbreaks?

When two or more people get sick from eating the same contaminated food, this is called a foodborne outbreak.

Many people think of foodborne outbreaks as something that happened when a group of people got sick after eating contaminated food at the same restaurant or potluck. However, many outbreaks have happened among people who lived far apart and ate food that was contaminated where it was grown or prepared before it was distributed in stores or restaurants across different states.

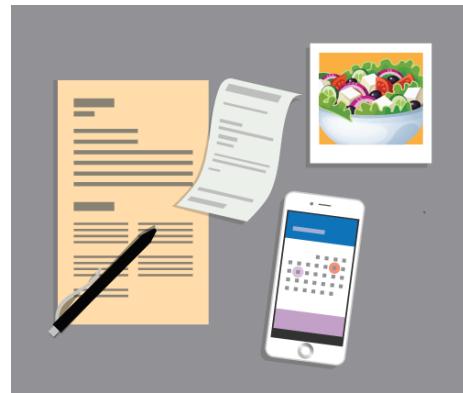


Foodborne outbreaks have been linked to many different types of contaminated food and drinks, including fruits and vegetables, raw dairy products, seafood, chicken, beef, pork, and processed foods (such as flour, cereal, and peanut butter). Raw or undercooked meat (including chicken and seafood) and animal products (like eggs or milk) are most likely to be contaminated with germs that can make people sick and cause foodborne outbreaks.

How can I help prevent foodborne outbreaks?

You can help the California Department of Public Health (CDPH) track and investigate foodborne outbreaks. If you think you have a foodborne illness:

1. **Report it to your local health department** – local health departments tell CDPH about foodborne illnesses so that CDPH and public health officials can identify and control outbreaks to prevent more people from getting sick. By sharing information about your foodborne illness with the local health department, you can help keep other people from getting sick.
2. **See a doctor or healthcare provider to get tested** – tests can help figure out what kind of germ or chemical made you sick.
3. **Keep track of what and where you ate in the past week** – the food that made you sick is often not the last food you ate!
 - Write down everything you remember eating and drinking in the 7 days before you got sick:
 - Keep track of where you ate or went shopping for food (such as restaurants, grocery stores, food trucks, parties, and other events with food).
 - Gather receipts from restaurants, grocery stores, or online food orders. If you took pictures of the food you ate, or menus you ordered from, those can be helpful too.
 - If you are enrolled in a food benefits program or a store rewards or loyalty program, that information can help, too. These programs keep track of recent purchases and other important details that you might not know or remember (like food brands and purchase dates).



Gathering this information and sharing it with your local health department and healthcare provider can help with an outbreak investigation – the more details you can remember, the better!

Learn more about how you can help solve foodborne outbreaks



What is the California Department of Public Health (CDPH) doing about foodborne illnesses and outbreaks?

Healthcare providers tell their local (county) health department about cases of foodborne illness, and in turn, local health departments tell CDPH so that public health officials can find and control outbreaks to prevent more people from getting sick. Health departments also collect lab test results from people who are sick. These tests are important because they help determine which people are getting sick by the same type of germ.

When CDPH learns of people who are getting sick by the same type of germ, they work with local, state, and federal health agencies to find out if the illnesses were caused by a common source, such as a contaminated food. CDPH and local health department officials may interview you over the phone to find out what you ate and did before you got sick. Your participation helps make a difference! To help prevent more people from getting sick, public health officials may sometimes temporarily close a restaurant involved in an outbreak or remove contaminated food products from stores.

More Information

- CDC Foodborne Outbreaks – *U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC)*
 - Timeline for Identifying and Reporting Illnesses in Foodborne Outbreaks
- CDC Food Safety
 - Safer Food Choices
- FDA Food Safety – *U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA)*
- Partnership for Food Safety Education
- Food Safety During Power Outage – *Foodsafety.gov*
- Food and Water Safety During Power Outages and Floods – *FDA*
- Leveraging Food Purchase History to Solve Foodborne Outbreaks– *Association of Food and Drug Officials*

Timeline for Identifying and Reporting



Foodborne Disease Webpages

- Amebiasis
- Botulism
- Brucellosis
- Campylobacteriosis
- Ciguatera Fish Poisoning
- Cyclosporiasis
- Cysticercosis (Pork Tapeworm)
- Domoic Acid and Amnesic Shellfish Poisoning
- Giardiasis
- Hepatitis A
- Listeriosis
- Norovirus (Norwalk Virus)
- Raw Milk and Raw Dairy Products
- Salmonellosis
- Scombroid Fish Poisoning
- Shiga Toxin-producing *E. coli* (STEC) Infection
- Shigellosis
- Toxoplasmosis
- Typhoid Fever
- Vibriosis (Non-Cholera)

Food and Beverage Recalls

- CDPH Food and Drug Branch Food Recalls
- FDA Recalls, Market Withdrawals, & Safety Alerts
- U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) Current Recalls and Alerts

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