

Foodborne Illness

When you consume food that is carrying harmful bacteria or viruses and you become unwell you may be suffering from a foodborne illness or you may say you have 'food poisoning'.

What is most interesting to note early on in this fact sheet is that if we feel unwell immediately after consuming food it is not always the food that we last consumed that has made us unwell. While some foodborne illnesses do strike within less than an hour, the majority and some of the most common forms of foodborne illness, can take anywhere from six hours to three days (or longer) for symptoms to appear.

We may think we are suffering from food poisoning however we may have in fact caught a stomach bug, also known as viral gastroenteritis. This is an inflammation of the stomach and intestines caused by a viral infection. Several different viruses may cause the stomach bug, common culprits include norovirus, rotavirus, and adenovirus.

A foodborne illness on the other hand can be caused by a variety of bacteria, viruses or a parasite. They each act a little differently but can affect us in similar, however slightly different ways.

Some of the most common types of foodborne illness in New Zealand are;

- Campylobacter
- Salmonella
- E.coli
- Listeria
- Bacillus cereus
- Norovirus (from contaminated foods and surfaces)

Some of the common symptoms of a foodborne illness are;

- Nausea & vomiting
- Diarrhoea (which can be bloody)
- Headache
- Stomach cramps or pains
- Fever or chills
- Muscle or joint aches.



How we contract a foodborne illness depends on the type of bacteria, virus or parasite you have come into contact with. People most commonly fall ill from touching or consuming:

- Raw poultry, raw red meat, raw fruit and vegetables and raw (unpasteurized) milk
- Unwashed fresh produce
- Undercooked eggs
- Contaminated water
- Contact with faeces
- Contact with farm animals, pets, birds or other animals

If you suspect you have a foodborne illness FoodTruths advises you to;

1 - If you are unwell then seek medical attention (your GP or hospital), they may advise you to get a test to help confirm your foodborne illness.

2 - Phone and speak to a Health Protection Officer from a Public Health Unit in your region, they will most likely conduct a brief phone interview with you to help determine the cause of your illness. (FoodTruths can assist you with the correct contact details for these services within your area). If you go to your GP or other healthcare provider they may do this for you

3 - Continue to practice good hand hygiene and remain at home until the symptoms have passed and you are feeling well within yourself

How you can help prevent a foodborne illness;

- Wash fresh fruit and vegetables under cold running water
- Cook all meat, poultry and eggs to the required temperature
- Avoid cross contamination between raw and cooked food.
- Wash hands thoroughly before, during and after cooking
- Make sure food is covered and stored correctly and in the fridge if required.

Resources:

<https://www.mpi.govt.nz/dmsdocument/3427-What-causes-food-poisoning>
<https://www.healthline.com/health/digestive-health/stomach-bug-or-food-poisoning#prevention>