

# FOODBORNE ILLNESS

Germs can enter food in a number of ways and make you and your family sick. Contamination can occur at every step of handling food. It can also be caused by chemical contaminants and natural toxins (poisons) found in plants, fruits, vegetables, animals, fish and shellfish.

## Food Contamination

Food can be contaminated during:

- Harvesting
- Production
- Transportation
- Preparation and storage

It can also happen:

- When there is improper washing of hands, dishes and utensils.
- When contaminated water is used to prepare food or beverages.
- When foods are cooked or maintained at inadequate temperatures.

## Symptoms of Foodborne Illness

When you eat contaminated food, you may get abdominal cramps, nausea, vomiting, diarrhoea and fever. Most people fully recover from foodborne illness. However, if it isn't treated early, it can result in chronic health problems. Pregnant women, young children, the elderly, and those with a weakened immune system are more susceptible to the adverse effects of foodborne illness.

### "Danger zone"

- *The "danger zone" for high risk foods such as meat, poultry, fish and shellfish is between 4° - 60°C (40° - 140°F).*
- *Keep food out of the danger zone, to prevent the growth of bacteria and keep food safe.*



## MINIMIZE THE RISK – PROTECT YOURSELF AND YOUR FAMILY

There are simple things you can do when you handle food to prevent foodborne illness:

### CLEAN

- Wash hands with soap and warm water to a slow count of 20 before, after and in between handling different foods, after using the bathroom, changing diapers, and handling money and pets.
- Wash and sanitize food surfaces, such as counter tops and cutting boards, before and after coming in contact with raw meat, poultry, seafood and eggs.

### SEPARATE

- Separate raw meat, poultry, fish and shellfish from fruits and vegetables during shopping.
- Separate raw and ready-to-eat foods at the grocery store and at home.
- Use a separate cutting board for raw meat and another for ready-to-eat foods.

### COOK

- Use drinking water to prepare food.
- Cook food thoroughly to safe minimum internal temperatures to destroy germs that might be present.
- Use a clean food thermometer to check the internal cooking temperature of meat, poultry, waterfowl, or fish. You can't always tell if food is cooked by the look, colour or smell.
- Keep hot food hot at 60°C (140°F) or higher until served.

### CHILL

- Keep fish and shellfish on ice in a cooler if they can't be refrigerated or cooked within 2 hours after catching/buying.



- Divide large amounts of cooked food or big pieces of meat into smaller portions for faster cooling.
- Refrigerate or freeze cooked foods within 2 hours of preparation.
- Keep cold foods cold at 4°C (40°F) or lower until served.

In addition, it is important that you:

- Obtain food from an approved source; product should look clean and fresh.
- Avoid handling food when you are sick, and for at least 2 days after symptoms are gone.
- Thaw high risk foods in the refrigerator, in cold water, or in the microwave.
- Cook high risk foods thawed in cold water or in the microwave immediately.
- Never thaw high risk foods (meat, poultry, seafood and eggs) on the counter at room temperature.
- Store food to recommended temperatures and for the recommended time.
- Throw out any leftover reheated food.

**Remember, throw out food that has been left at room temperature for more than 2 hours. If in doubt, throw it out!**

**Consult a health care provider or go to a health centre if you think you have foodborne illness.**

**For additional information, and for the recommended minimum internal cooking temperatures and storage times, talk to your local Environmental Health Officer or visit [HealthyCanadians.gc.ca/FirstNationsFoodSafety](https://www.healthycanadians.gc.ca/FirstNationsFoodSafety).**