Tips to Prevent Bacterial Food Poisoning

- Practice good hygiene; wash hands thoroughly before, during and after food preparation and service.
- Avoid the use of porous and wooden cutting boards; they harbor bacteria.
- Wash cutting boards frequently.
- Keep cold foods cold, preferably less than 40 degrees Fahrenheit.
- Keep hot foods hot, preferably above 165 degrees Fahrenheit.
- Cool foods rapidly after preparation.
- Refrigerate leftover foods immediately.
- Thaw frozen food in the refrigerator.
- Cook food thoroughly to kill bacteria.

Other Types of Food Poisoning

Additives and Preservatives

Food additives and preservatives also may contain poisons and produce toxic and allergic reactions. Monosodium glutamate (MSG), which may be found in Chinese foods, can cause headache, intestinal discomfort and even chest pain that resembles a heart attack.

Chemicals

People also may be poisoned by eating food contaminated with industrial chemicals. Heavy metal poisoning can occur when food products are stored in improper containers. For example, lead poisoning can occur when acidic substances, such as citrus juices, are stored in pottery containers.

Natural Toxins

Some mushrooms can cause serious liver poisoning. Never pick and eat wild mushrooms.

Toxins found in fish can cause fatal poisoning episodes. Shellfish also can harbor viruses and bacteria; always keep them cold and serve them thoroughly before eating.

If You Suspect Food Poisoning:

- Contact your local poison center or physician immediately.
- Drink clear fluids to avoid becoming dehydrated.
- Do not self-administer medication unless instructed to do so.
- If symptoms persist, seek medical attention.
- Do not eat any additional contaminated food until it is immediately.

If you suspect a poisoning emergency, call your local poison center immediately at 1-800-222-1222.

Use Mr. Yuk to teach your children about poisons and how to contact your poison center.

Mr. Yuk is lovingly recreated by Childcare Safety, Inc., with the assistance of Children's Hospital of Pittsburgh and Children's Hospital of Pittsburgh.

Illustrations by Elizabeth A. Kiesling

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**Facts About Food Poisoning**

Food poisoning is a serious problem that affects thousands of individuals every year. Anyone who eats food that has been contaminated by bacteria or chemicals can get food poisoning. In addition, some plants and wild mushrooms can cause food poisoning. Food poisoning must be recognized early to prevent a minor problem from becoming a serious health problem.

**Bacterial Food Poisoning**

**Basic Bacteria**

*Staphylococcus, Salmonella, Shigella, E. coli, and Clostridium* are common forms of bacteria that can enter food and cause food poisoning.

*Staphylococcus* Staphylococcus (staph) bacteria grow very rapidly, especially in foods with high protein content such as meat, beans, and dairy products. When these foods are not kept adequately hot or cold, the bacteria multiply and produce a toxin that cannot be destroyed by additional cooling or cooking. Once the contaminated food is eaten, the poison affects the digestive tract and may cause nausea, cramping, vomiting, and diarrhea. The symptoms can last for 24–48 hours.

*Salmonella* Salmonella causes one of the most dangerous forms of food poisoning. Salmonella bacteria are found most commonly in raw or uncooked chicken, turkey, eggs, and unpasteurized dairy products. The bacteria invade and reproduce in the digestive tract causing severe diarrhea. Symptoms may last for days and dehydration is a concern. It is important to seek immediate medical attention if you suspect Salmonella food poisoning.

*Shigella* Shigella usually is transmitted by food handlers. Good hygiene, thorough handwashing and careful washing and preparation of fruits and vegetables can help prevent Shigella from contaminating food. When Shigella bacteria are present in food, they enter the digestive tract and cause severe diarrhea in patients. The bacteria may enter the bloodstream and infect the entire body.

*E. coli* An extremely infectious E. coli strain (E. coli 0157:H7) has been publicly widely as the cause of serious illness and fatalities. However, most often, individuals who are infected with E. coli experience severe abdominal cramps and diarrhea. A small percentage of people may suffer permanent kidney damage if the infection goes untreated. Since ground beef is the main source of E. coli bacteria, the best way to prevent E. coli food poisoning is to cook the meat thoroughly. Never eat raw or undercooked ground beef.

**Botulism**

Bacteria called Clostridium botulinum are responsible for the most deadly form of bacterial food poisoning. When the bacteria are produced improperly, they go on to grow and produce a toxin that affects the nervous system and causes botulism. The symptoms of botulism may begin as soon as 12–36 hours after eating the contaminated food. Symptoms include double vision, difficulty swallowing, and the inability to breathe. A common warning sign of possible botulism contamination is a bulging container or lid. This bulging occurs from gas that is produced by the growing bacteria.

A rare form of botulism called infant botulism may occur when honey is fed to infants. Honey may contain botulism spores that can become bacteria when swallowed. Honey should not be fed to infants.