

Food Safety Facts

Knowing how to properly handle and prepare food can help you avoid foodborne illnesses and stay on good terms with your digestive system.



Did you know that there are about 1.1 million cases of foodborne illnesses in Canada every year? People with HIV can be particularly at risk, so read on to see how you can avoid being one of these cases.

FOOD SAFETY 101 – A CRASH COURSE

Foodborne illness, sometimes called food poisoning, happens when you eat food contaminated with disease-causing germs, such as bacteria, viruses and parasites.

Symptoms of foodborne illness include stomach cramps, nausea, vomiting, diarrhea, headache and fever.

Depending on the type of germ you ate, you could start feeling sick a few hours after consuming contaminated food, or even a few days or weeks later! People often think it's the last thing they ate, but this is not always true.

If you have a weakened immune system for whatever reason—HIV or alcoholism, cancer, diabetes or organ transplantation—it can be more difficult for you to fight off infections. To reduce your risk of getting a foodborne illness, it's important to take extra care when handling, storing, preparing and shopping for food.

Some food can be more risky because of the way it is produced and the conditions and length of time it is stored. You can reduce your risk by avoiding certain foods, such as sushi or unpasteurized dairy products,

and by choosing safer alternatives, such as fully cooked fish or pasteurized dairy products.

FOLLOW THE FOOD SAFETY STEPS

Following the four key steps to food safety is the best way to protect yourself from foodborne illness:

- **Separate:** Separate your raw foods, such as meat and eggs, from cooked foods, fruits and vegetables to avoid cross-contamination.
- **Clean:** Wash your hands, kitchen surfaces, utensils and reusable shopping bags often with warm, soapy water.
- **Chill:** Refrigerate your food and leftovers promptly at 4°C or below.
- **Cook:** You can't tell by looking. Use a digital thermometer to be sure! Cook your food to safe internal temperatures. +

Check out www.healthycanadians.ca for lots of useful info on safe food handling at home and in the grocery store. The site features a **Select the Safer Alternative** chart, which offers many safer options to common foods that can be riskier for people with weakened immune systems, and a **Safe Cooking Internal Temperature** chart, which lists the safe internal temperatures for meats and egg dishes.

You can also call Health Canada toll-free at 1.866.225.0709 or TTY at 1.800.276.1245.

BEWARE THE “BAD BUGS”

These types of foodborne illnesses are dangerous for people with weakened immune systems:

***E. coli* O157:H7** infection – caused by bacteria that may be found in foods such as:

- raw and undercooked ground beef
- unpasteurized fruit juice or cider
- sprouts
- unpasteurized dairy products

Listeria infection – caused by bacteria that may be found in a wide variety of refrigerated **ready-to-eat foods**, such as:

- raw and unpasteurized dairy products
- non-dried deli meats
- hot dogs straight from the package

Vibrio infection – caused by bacteria that may be found in **raw and undercooked shellfish**, such as:

- oysters
- clams
- mussels

Salmonella infection – caused by bacteria that may be found in a variety of foods but especially in:

- raw and undercooked chicken
- raw eggs
- raw milk