

FactSheet

Para Su Información

Foodborne Illness: What it is and how to report it

What is foodborne illness?

Foodborne illness is often called food poisoning. It occurs when someone becomes ill after eating a food or drinking a beverage contaminated with a harmful substance.

What causes foodborne illness?

Not every foodborne illness is the same. It occurs when food is contaminated with a harmful substance, such as bacteria, virus, parasites, natural toxins or chemicals. Some substances cause illness within minutes, while others take several hours, days or even weeks. For example, Salmonella bacteria usually take 12-72 hours after ingestion to cause illness. So remember, it's not always the last food eaten that caused illness. The food that caused the illness may actually have been eaten several days before the illness began.

Symptoms of foodborne illness:

Common Symptoms	Frequent Symptoms	Unusual Symptoms
Vomiting	Fever	Irregular heartbeat
Diarrhea	Headache	Flushing of skin
Nausea	Chills	Difficulty breathing
Abdominal cramps	Muscle aches	Paralysis
	Dizziness	

Foodborne illness is not always the cause for vomiting or diarrhea. If you share a meal with someone and you both get sick, it's likely that you

are both suffering from a foodborne illness. However, the more time you spend with another person, such as sharing the same residence or workplace, the more likely it is that you will both be exposed to the same illnesses. Many gastrointestinal illnesses, especially those that are viral, are not caused by food or drink.

What should I do if I suspect I have a foodborne illness?

You should consult your health care provider for advice on whether medical treatment is necessary. Many foodborne illnesses are short-lived and people recover without any medical treatment. However, it's always wise to consult a health care provider if you are concerned about the seriousness of your illness. Young children, the elderly and people with poor immune systems are more likely to experience severe illness. If you see a health care provider, you may be asked to provide a stool specimen for testing. Most commercial laboratories can identify bacterial and parasitic pathogens. There are no approved commercial laboratory tests for most viral pathogens or for chemicals and toxins.

How do I report a foodborne or suspected foodborne illness?

If you believe your illness was caused by eating at a commercial food establishment (restaurant, deli or caterer), call the Southern Nevada Health District, Office of Epidemiology at (702) 759-1300 or e-mail at epidemiology@snhdmail.org. Please provide your contact information so an investigator can follow up if more information is required.

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If you believe your illness was caused by eating prepackaged foods, call the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) at (510) 337-6741. If you believe your illness was caused by eating meat you purchased at a grocery store and prepared at home, call the USDA at (800) 535-4555.

When you call, be prepared to answer some questions. The interview may take 10-15 minutes to complete. You will be asked to provide details about the ill person(s), what they ate during the **72 hours** before getting ill, and the symptoms they are experiencing. You will be asked to describe the symptoms, when they started, how long they lasted, and if you were seen by a health care provider. You may also be asked about recent travel, pet ownership and exposure to drinking and recreational water.

NOTE: If you have questions or concerns about your health, you should consult your health care provider.

Will I have to give my name?

You will be asked to give your name and the names, addresses and phone numbers of all ill people. You are **not required** to give your name. However, the more information you provide, the easier it will be for health district personnel to complete the necessary follow-up and investigation. **All information you provide is confidential.** Your identity, along with any ill people, will not be disclosed to others, including the Environmental Health Specialist sent to inspect the facility, the food establishment without your permission.

What happens after I file my complaint?

After the complaint is taken by an Epidemiology staff member, the information regarding the complaint (minus any identifying information) is

forwarded to the Environmental Health Division of the Southern Nevada Health District. This division employs the Environmental Health Specialists (restaurant inspectors) who go out to the establishment to conduct an inspection. The inspector will review food handling practices, including how the foods you consumed were handled and prepared.

What should I do if I've consumed adulterated food (containing an insect or other object) prepared at a commercial food establishment that did not make me sick?

Report the incident to Southern Nevada Health District, Environmental Health Division at (702) 759-0588.

Where can I get more information?

For more information on foodborne illness, see the following information from the Food and Drug Administration:

FDA's Bad Bug Book

<http://vm.cfsan.fda.gov/~mow/intro.html>

FDA's The Unwelcome Dinner Guest:
Preventing Foodborne Illness

<http://www.cfsan.fda.gov/~dms/fdunwelc.html>

FDA's Foodborne Illness page

<http://www.cfsan.fda.gov/~mow/foodborn.html>



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