

How to Report a Foodborne Illness in Maryland

Fact Sheet, FS-1034
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1 in 6 Americans Will Acquire a Foodborne Illness Each Year¹

Foodborne illness is a disease that is either infectious or toxic in nature, and occurs through the ingestion of contaminated food.²

A foodborne disease outbreak happens when:

- two or more people get the same illness from the same contaminated food or drink³
- one case of botulism, cholera, mushroom poisoning, trichinosis, or fish poisoning such as ciguatera poisoning, scombroid poisoning, paralytic shellfish poisoning, and other neurotoxic shellfish poisoning.⁴

There are Three Important Reasons to Report Foodborne Illness

- Contact your local health department if you believe you or someone you know became ill from eating a certain food.
- Reporting illnesses to your local health department helps them identify potential foodborne disease outbreaks.
- Public health officials investigate outbreaks to control them, so more people do not get

sick in the outbreak and to learn how to prevent similar outbreaks from happening.⁵

When to Consult Your Doctor¹

Symptoms include:

- Fever over 101.5°F, (measured orally)
- Blood in stool
- Prolonged vomiting that prevents keeping liquids down
- Signs of dehydration, including a decrease in urination, dry mouth and throat, and feeling dizzy when standing up
- Diarrheal illness that lasts more than 3 days

If it is an emergency, call 911

How is Foodborne Illness Diagnosed?⁶

Your health care provider may ask for:

- Symptoms
- Food and drink eaten the past few days
- Physical examination
- Vomit sample (if available)
- Stool sample (if available)

Local Health Departments

Allegany County	301-759-5112
Anne Arundel County	410-222-7256
Baltimore City	410-396-4436
Baltimore County	410-887-2724
Calvert County	410-535-5400
Caroline County	410-479-8000
Carroll County	410-876-4900
Cecil County	410-996-5100
Charles County	301-609-6810
Dorchester County	410-228-3223
Frederick County	301-600-3342
Garrett County	301-334-7777
Harford County	410-838-1774
Howard County	410-313-1412
Kent County	410-778-1350
Montgomery County	240-777-1755
Prince Georges County	301-583-3750
Queen Anne's County	410-758-0720
St. Mary's County	301-475-4316
Somerset County	443-523-1740
Talbot County	410-819-5600
Washington County	240-313-3210
Wicomico County	410-543-6943
Worcester County	410-632-1100

Tips for if You Think You Are Sick⁶

1. Seek immediate medical attention: consult your health care provider.
2. Contact your local health department.
3. Practice good hygiene:
 - Wash hands with soap and clean, running water, or
 - Clean hands with a hand sanitizer that contains at least 60% alcohol.⁷
4. Prevent dehydration.
5. Request laboratory testing. Knowing which pathogen is making you sick will help to get the right care.

6. Record foods eaten the past 7 days. The last thing you ate is most likely **NOT** what made you sick.
7. Save your receipts. Save all relevant food and drink receipts for the time period you think the illness took place.
8. Save suspected food products. **Label food items so no one else eats them.**
9. Handle suspected food as little as possible and keep them sealed and cold/frozen, so they can be tested if necessary.
10. Reach out to your community or the media. Social media may let you know if others in your community have a similar illness.

Local Health Departments Monitor Foodborne Illness in Maryland

In Maryland, local health departments receive and investigate routine disease surveillance reports and foodborne illness outbreak reports.

1. The state health department analyzes investigates cases and outbreaks of foodborne illness.
2. The resulting reports go to the federal Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC).⁸
3. Many surveillance systems are used in Maryland to provide information about the amount of foodborne disease.
4. These surveillance systems provide data to CDC for addition in national-level monitoring.

References

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5. U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. *Report Food Poisoning*. 2015. <http://www.foodsafety.gov/report/poisoning/>
6. Stop Foodborne Illness. <http://www.stopfoodborneillness.org>
7. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. *Handwashing: Clean Hands Save Lives*. October 2015. <http://www.cdc.gov/handwashing>
8. Maryland Department of Health and Mental Hygiene. *Emerging Infections Program*. October 2015. <http://phpa.dhmh.maryland.gov/OIDEOR/EIP/SitePages/Home.aspx>

Table 1. Most Common Causes of Foodborne Illness Outbreaks in Maryland, 2005-2014.

Organism	Onset Time After Ingesting	Symptoms & Signs	Duration	Food Sources
<i>Bacillus cereus</i>	10-16 hrs.	Abdominal cramps, watery diarrhea, nausea	24-48 hrs.	Meats, stews, gravies, vanilla sauce
<i>Campylobacter jejuni</i>	2-5 days	Diarrhea, cramps, fever, and vomiting; diarrhea may be bloody	2-10 days	Raw and undercooked poultry, unpasteurized milk, contaminated water
<i>Clostridium perfringens</i>	8-16 hrs.	Intense abdominal cramps, watery diarrhea	Usually 24 hrs.	Meats, poultry, gravy, dried or precooked foods, time and/or temperature-abused foods
<i>Cyclospora cayentanensis</i>	1-14 days, usually at least 1 week	Diarrhea (usually watery), loss of appetite, substantial loss of weight, stomach cramps, nausea, vomiting, fatigue	May be remitting and relapsing over weeks to months	Various types of fresh produce (imported berries, lettuce, basil)
Shiga Toxin-producing <i>E. coli</i> (including <i>E. coli</i> O157:H7)	1-8 days	Severe (often bloody) diarrhea, abdominal pain and vomiting. Usually, little or no fever is present. More common in children 4 years or younger. Can lead to kidney failure	5-10 days	Undercooked beef (especially hamburger), unpasteurized milk and juice, raw fruits and vegetables (e.g. sprouts), and contaminated water
<i>Entamoeba histolytica</i>	2-4 weeks, but invasive intestinal disease may occur days to years after initial infection	Mild to severe diarrhea that contains mucus and blood, and a swollen abdomen. Sometimes the illness becomes long-lasting or permanent, with weight loss and tiredness. In rare cases, it can spread to other parts of the body. If it goes to the liver, it can also cause fever, pain, and tenderness in the upper right part of the abdomen, and nausea.	Few days to several weeks	Water used to water crops, water used to wash produce, swimming pools, and water used for other recreational activities
<i>Listeria monocytogenes</i>	9-48 hrs. for gastro-intestinal symptoms, 2-6 weeks for invasive disease	Fever, muscle aches, and nausea or diarrhea. Pregnant women may have mild flu-like illness, and infection can lead to premature delivery or stillbirth. The elderly or immunocompromised patients may develop bacteremia or meningitis	Variable	Unpasteurized milk, soft cheeses made with unpasteurized milk, ready-to-eat deli meats
Norovirus	12-48 hrs.	Nausea, vomiting, abdominal cramping, diarrhea, fever, headache. Diarrhea is more prevalent in adults, vomiting more common in children	12-60 hrs.	Raw produce, contaminated drinking water, uncooked foods and cooked foods that are not reheated after contact with an infected food handler; shellfish from contaminated waters

Organism	Onset Time After Ingesting	Symptoms & Signs	Duration	Food Sources
<i>Salmonella</i>	6-48 hrs.	Diarrhea, fever, abdominal cramps, vomiting	4-7 days	Eggs, poultry, meat, unpasteurized milk or juice, cheese, contaminated raw fruits and vegetables
Scombrototoxin	Minutes to a few hours	Tingling or burning in or around the mouth or throat, rash or hives, drop in blood pressure, headache, dizziness, itching of the skin, nausea, vomiting, diarrhea, asthmatic-like constriction of air passage, heart palpitation, and respiratory distress	Several hours to several days	When certain fish aren't properly refrigerated before being processed or cooked. Examples of fish: tuna, mahi-mahi, bluefish, sardines, mackerel, amberjack, anchovies, and others.
<i>Shigella</i>	4-7 days	Abdominal cramps, fever, and diarrhea. Stools may contain blood and mucus	24-48 hrs.	Raw produce, contaminated drinking water, uncooked foods and cooked foods that are not reheated after contact with an infected food handler
<i>Staphylococcus aureus</i>	1-6 hrs.	Sudden onset of severe nausea and vomiting. Abdominal cramps. Diarrhea and fever may be present	24-48 hrs.	Unrefrigerated or improperly refrigerated meats, potato and egg salads, cream pastries
<i>Trichinella</i> Species	1-4 weeks	Mild or not obvious, but include diarrhea, abdominal discomfort, and possible nausea, vomiting. Muscle pain, fever, weakness, and facial swelling around the eyes.	Few weeks; however, some patients remain asymptomatic for years.	Under cooked meat, especially from wild game such as bear and wild boar. Domestic pigs

Organism	Onset Time After Ingesting	Symptoms & Signs	Duration	Food Sources
<i>Vibrio parahaemolyticus</i>	4-96 hrs.	Watery (occasionally bloody) diarrhea, abdominal cramps, nausea, vomiting, fever	2-5 days	Undercooked or raw seafood, such as shellfish
<i>Vibrio vulnificus</i>	1-7 days	Watery (occasionally bloody) diarrhea, abdominal cramps, nausea, vomiting, fever Vomiting, diarrhea, abdominal pain, bloodborne infection. Fever, bleeding within the skin, ulcers requiring surgical removal. Can be fatal to persons with liver disease or weakened immune systems	2-8 days	Undercooked or raw seafood, such as shellfish (especially oysters)
<i>Yersinia species</i>	1-14 days or longer	High fever, stomach pain, diarrhea, and sometimes vomiting. Diarrhea maybe bloody. Some people will get arthritis-like symptoms, such as joint pains and rashes. Serious complications may affect the heart.	Few days to 3 weeks Chronic enterocolitis can last several months	Pork, chitterlings or chitlins, unpasteurized “raw” milk, beef, lamb, oysters, fish, crabs, soil, water. <i>Yersinia enterocolitica</i> has been associated with pigs

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