



## Food poisoning

This fact sheet can be made available in other languages or formats on request by contacting 0161 770 6666. For further information please see our detailed fact sheet Information for all.

### What is food poisoning?

Food poisoning is an illness that occurs after eating or drinking anything that is contaminated. Usually it is bacteria (germs) on the food that can cause the illness, but sometimes it can be chemicals, viruses or parasites.

It can affect anyone, but the very young and the elderly are particularly vulnerable. The symptoms depend on what caused the illness, but most common are diarrhoea, sickness, stomach pains and sometimes fever.

Illness may last for only a day or continue for 1 or 2 weeks.

### How can I tell if food is contaminated?

You can't! Even food that looks and tastes good can give you food poisoning.

### How is food poisoning caught?

You can catch food poisoning by eating raw or undercooked foods or any food that has been in contact with these. You can also get it by swallowing bacteria that has been passed from the bowel of someone who is ill.

People often wrongly assume that the last meal eaten was the cause of their illness. In fact the most common form of food poisoning is caused by a bacteria which can take between 2 and 10 days to show symptoms. This can make it very difficult to identify the food at fault unless a number of people have similar symptoms after eating food from the same source.

## How do I avoid catching it?

By good personal hygiene. Wash hands thoroughly with warm water and soap, and dry with a clean towel every time you go to the toilet, after changing a baby's nappy, contact with pets and before preparing and eating food.

Thorough cooking kills food poisoning bacteria, so make sure food (especially meat) is cooked right through and piping hot in the middle. Don't re-heat food more than once.

At low temperatures bacteria stop growing or forming toxins, so cool any leftover food quickly and then keep it in the fridge. Follow the storage labels on food carefully.

When cooking, make sure work surfaces and utensils are kept clean. Keep raw and ready to eat food apart, to avoid bacteria passing from one to the other. Store meat in sealed containers at the bottom of the fridge, and use different chopping boards for raw and ready to eat foods.

If you are having a party, don't prepare food too far in advance, and keep the food either piping hot or refrigerated until it is served. If you are giving food to a large number of guests you might want to look at our fact sheet [Catering for large numbers](#).

## What to do if you are ill?

You should consult your doctor so that your condition can be assessed. A stool sample may be needed to find out what form of food poisoning you have.

You need to stay off work or school until you have been free from any symptoms for 48 hours. Also children should not come into contact with other children until they are fully recovered and have been symptom free for 48 hours.

Ideally, you should stay away from others until your symptoms have stopped, particularly the elderly or the very young. If there are other people in your household you need to make sure they wash their hands thoroughly with warm water and soap after, for instance, using the toilet, changing nappies handling soiled clothes and before eating or preparing food. Make sure you use a separate towel for drying your hands. If possible, do not prepare food for anyone while you are still ill.

## **Contacting us**

If you would like more information about food safety issues you can contact us by:

### **Writing to**

Food Safety Team, Chadderton Town Hall, Middleton Road, Chadderton, Oldham, OL9 6PP

### **Phoning**

0161 770 4484

### **Faxing**

0161 770 4500

### **Emailing**

[env.foodsafety@oldham.gov.uk](mailto:env.foodsafety@oldham.gov.uk)

For more information about food safety please see our other detailed fact sheets:

- **Infectious diseases**
- **Campylobacter**
- **Cryptosporidiosis**
- **Dysentery (Shigella)**
- **E.coli O157**
- **Enteric fever (typhoid and paratyphoid)**
- **Giardiasis**
- **Hand, foot and mouth disease**
- **Hepatitis A**
- **Salmonella**
- **Staphylococcus aureus**
- **Viral gastroenteritis ('Noroviruses')**
- **Farm visits**
- **Barbecues**
- **Catering for large numbers**
- **Home catering**
- **Controlling the temperature of food**
- **Food complaints**
- **Food safety enforcement policy**
- **Food safety training**
- **Inspection of food businesses**
- **What do date codes on food mean?**

Alternatively, visit [www.food.gov.uk](http://www.food.gov.uk).

## **We value your comments and suggestions**

We want to provide good quality service for people in Oldham and as we are a public service you have a say in what we do. We want you to be completely satisfied with our services but to ensure this we need to know what you think. What do we do best? Where could we improve things? Do you have any ideas or suggestions? Only by listening to you can we give you the service you deserve.

If you wish to make a comment about our services you can e-mail us on [customer.feedback@oldham.gov.uk](mailto:customer.feedback@oldham.gov.uk)

or you can phone us on 0161 770 4191

or you can write to us: Complaints Officer

Strategy and Resources Directorate

PO Box 160

Civic Centre

Oldham, OL1 1UG

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