



Is it Safe to Eat Out?

Cost, taste and atmosphere are important in a restaurant, but what most people really want to know is whether or not the food is safe.

Foodborne illness results from eating food contaminated with bacteria (or their toxins) or other pathogens such as parasites or viruses. The illnesses range from upset stomach to more serious symptoms. Although most foodborne infections are undiagnosed and unreported, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) estimates that every year about 76 million people in the United States become sick from contaminants in food. Of these, about 5,000 die.

Causes

Harmful bacteria are the most common causes of foodborne illnesses. Some bacteria may be present on foods when you purchase them. Raw foods are not free of germs. Raw meat and poultry may become contaminated during slaughter. Seafood may become contaminated during harvest or through processing. One in 20,000 eggs may be contaminated with Salmonella inside the egg shell. Produce such as lettuce, tomatoes, sprouts, and melons can become contaminated with Salmonella, Shigella, or E. Coli 0157:H7. Contamination can occur during growing, harvesting, processing, storing, shipping, or final preparation. Sources of contamination are varied; however, these



items are grown in the soil and therefore may become contaminated during growth or through processing and distribution. Contamination may also occur during food preparation in the restaurant or in the person's kitchen.

Symptoms

In most cases of foodborne illness, symptoms resemble intestinal flu and may last a few hours or even several days. Symptoms can range from mild to serious and include:

- stomach cramps, nausea, vomiting, diarrhea, fever or dehydration

Risk Factors

Some people are at greater risk for bacterial infections because of their age or immune status. Young children, pregnant women and their fetuses, the elderly, and people with lowered immunity are at greatest risk.

Complications

Some micro-organisms cause far more serious illness than vomiting or diarrhea. They can cause spontaneous abortion or death.

In some people, especially children, hemolytic uremic syndrome (HUS) can result from infection by a particular strain of bacteria, and can lead to kidney failure and death. HUS is a rare disorder that affects primarily young children between the ages of 1 and 10 years and is the leading cause of acute kidney failure in previously healthy children. The child may become infected after eating/drinking contaminated food, such as meat (especially under-

cooked ground beef), unpasteurized apple cider or apple juice, or raw sprouts.

You need to see a doctor right away if you feel like you are going to "pass out", are very dizzy, or have confusion or difficulty reasoning



Diagnosis

Your doctor may be able to diagnose foodborne illness from a list of what you've recently eaten and results from proper laboratory tests.

Prevention

Most cases of foodborne illness can be prevented through proper cooking or processing of food, which kills bacteria. In addition, because bacteria multiply rapidly between 40 degrees Fahrenheit and 140 degrees Fahrenheit, food must be kept out of this danger zone. Always practice proper hand washing and safe food handling.

Health Department staff conducts inspections of all licensed food service establishments, conduct plan reviews prior to opening new establishments and investigate all reported cases of foodborne disease outbreaks.

Berrien County Health

Department:
Preventing Disease,
Prolonging Life and
Protecting the
Health of the
Community.



May Is Summer Safety Month

Summer is coming!! May is Summer Safety Month, and the health department will have articles about food safety, water safety, skin cancer prevention, outdoor injury prevention, and safe graduation parties. For comments or questions about any of these topics, please call us at **926-7121**.

What to Look for when you are at a Restaurant:

- Use your nose. If the place smells unpleasant this could indicate poor cleaning and maintenance.
- Look around outside. If the entrance and backdoor, especially near the trash, are neat and clean, it's a good bet the kitchen is sanitary.
- Check the restroom. If the restrooms are not clean, they're not likely to keep the kitchen clean either.
- Check for spots. If they give you a messy menu, something they know you'll look at closely, what else aren't they cleaning? Also, check for food left on utensils or silverware.
- Watch hands. Are the servers clean and neat? Watch for servers which may be coughing and sneezing without washing their hands.
- No touching. Servers should not touch the "business end" of anything that comes in contact with your food, such as fork tines the "bowl" of the spoon or the blade of your table knife.
- No re-use of plates at a salad bar. You should always receive a new plate when returning to the salad bar.
- Finally, are hot foods hot and cold foods cold? Keeping foods at the correct temperatures is one important factor to reduce food borne illnesses.

For more information about foodborne illnesses, call the health department at:

927-5623

Special thanks to Deb Clement for her help with this article!

The Berrien County Health Department has five locations to serve you:

Benton Harbor

769 Pipestone
P.O. Box 706
926-7121

M-139 Office

2106 S. M-139
927-5623

School Based

870 Colfax Ave
925-4500

Niles

1205 N. Front St.
684-2800

Three Oaks

21 N. Elm
756-2008

Or visit us on the web at www.berriencohlthdept.org

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