

Food Safety

Foodborne Germs and Illnesses

Causes of Food Poisoning

Many different [disease-causing germs](#) can contaminate foods, so there are many different foodborne infections (also called foodborne disease or food poisoning).

- Researchers have identified more than 250 foodborne diseases.
- Most of them are infections, caused by a variety of bacteria, viruses, and [parasites](#).
- Harmful toxins and chemicals also can contaminate foods and cause foodborne illness.

CDC estimates that each year 48 million people get sick from a foodborne illness, 128,000 are hospitalized, and 3,000 die.

Do I Have Food Poisoning?

Common [symptoms](#) of foodborne diseases are nausea, vomiting, stomach cramps, and diarrhea. However, symptoms may differ among the different types of foodborne diseases. Symptoms can sometimes be severe, and some foodborne illnesses can even be life-threatening. Although [anyone can get a foodborne illness, some people are more likely](#) to develop one. Those groups include:



- Older adults
- Young children
- People with immune systems weakened from medical conditions, such as diabetes, liver disease, kidney disease, organ transplants, or HIV/AIDS, or from receiving chemotherapy or radiation treatment.
- Pregnant women

Most people with a foodborne illness get better without medical treatment, but people with severe symptoms should see their [doctor](#).

[Learn more about the symptoms and sources of food poisoning >>](#)

Some Common Foodborne Germs

The **top five germs** that cause illnesses from food eaten in the United States are:

- [Norovirus](#)
- [Salmonella](#)
- [Clostridium perfringens](#)
- [Campylobacter](#)
- [Staphylococcus aureus](#) (Staph)

Some other germs don't cause as many illnesses, but when they do, the **illnesses are more likely to lead to hospitalization**. Those germs include:

- [Clostridium botulinum](#) (botulism)



E. coli

- *Listeria*
- *Escherichia coli* (*E. coli*)
- *Vibrio*

[See a complete A-Z index of foodborne germs >>](#)

Food Safety Tips



ones.

Anyone can get sick from eating contaminated food. Follow [four simple food safety steps](#)—clean, separate, cook, and chill—to lower your chance of food poisoning and to protect yourself and your loved

More Information

- [Food Poisoning Symptoms](#)
- [People With a Higher Risk of Food Poisoning](#)
- [How to Prevent Food Poisoning](#)
- [Foodborne Illness A-Z Index](#)