

## Foodborne Illnesses Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs)

### What causes foodborne illness?

- Over 40 different kinds of bacteria, viruses, parasites, and molds may cause foodborne illness and outbreaks. A foodborne illness is sometimes referred to as food poisoning or “stomach flu.”

### Who is affected by foodborne illness?

- Everyone is at risk for foodborne illness. Highly susceptible populations (HSP) are more likely to experience a severe case of foodborne illness and include:
  1. Immunocompromised (an immune system which is impaired by disease or medical treatment)
  2. Preschool-age children
  3. Elderly
  4. Sick
  5. Confined to facilities that provide custodial or institutional care

### What are the “Big 5” foodborne pathogens?

- The Big 5 include:
  1. *E. coli*/STEC
  2. Hepatitis A virus
  3. Norovirus
  4. *Salmonella*
  5. *Shigella*

The Big 5 are a group of highly infectious foodborne pathogens and they have a low infectious dose, contaminate the gastrointestinal system after ingestion, and are shed in feces in high numbers. An employee infected with a Big 5 pathogen will typically shed hundreds of thousands of pathogens in their feces, which can easily be transmitted to food even when good handwashing practices are used. Consequently, the illness experienced by the consumer can be very severe.

### What symptoms of foodborne illness should food establishments be most concerned?

- Vomiting
- Diarrhea
- Jaundice (yellow skin or eyes)
- Sore throat with fever
- Infected cuts and burns with pus on hands and wrists

### What should employees do when they have symptoms of vomiting or diarrhea?

- If at work:
  - Stop work immediately
  - Report to the manager
  - Go home and do not return until 24 hours without vomiting and diarrhea and no medications.
- If before work:
  - Report to the manager by telephone

- Do not return until 24 hours without vomiting and diarrhea and no medications.

**What should employees do if they are not feeling well and their skin or eyes turn yellow?**

- Report the symptoms to their manager who should contact the county health department immediately.
- Seek medical attention.
- Not return to work until after receiving clearance from their healthcare provider.

**What should employees do if they have an infected wound or cut on their hand or arm?**

- Report the wound or cut to the manager.
- Properly cover it with a clean, impermeable bandage.
- For hand wounds, use single-use gloves before returning to work.

**What should employees do if they have a sore throat with fever?**

- Report the illness to the manager.
- Stay home until 24 hours without fever and no medications.

**Where can managers and employees learn more about preventing foodborne illness and following effective food safety practices?**

- CDC Handwashing: Clean Hands Save Lives, <http://www.cdc.gov/handwashing/>
- FDA Bad Bug Book, Foodborne Pathogenic Microorganisms and Natural Toxins Handbook, <http://www.fda.gov/Food/FoodborneIllnessContaminants/CausesOfIllnessBadBugBook/default.htm>
- CDC A-Z Index for Foodborne Illness, <http://www.cdc.gov/ncidod/diseases/food/index.htm>
- Gateway to Government Food Safety Information, <http://www.foodsafety.gov>