

Food Poisoning Information

Staphylococcus

Producing toxins in food, Staphylococci are a common cause of food poisoning.

What is it?

Staphylococci are a type of bacteria commonly found on human hair and skin. It may also be present in the mouth, nose and ears or on boils and wounds. About 25 percent of all people are carriers of these bacteria. Food poisoning caused by the *Staphylococcus aureus* bacteria is widespread and relatively frequent.

Food poisoning

Staphylococci bacteria multiply in food, producing toxins that can survive boiling temperature and chemical sanitisers. Staphylococcus food poisoning may occur by eating food contaminated with a large quantity of the *Staphylococcus aureus* bacteria. Pastries, custards, salad dressings, sandwiches, sliced meat and meat products have a higher risk of being contaminated. Storing these foods at room temperature for several hours allows the bacteria to multiply.

The symptoms

Developing within two to four hours, *Staphylococcus* food poisoning is abrupt and can have a violent onset. The most common symptoms are severe nausea, cramps and vomiting. It is often accompanied by diarrhoea. The symptoms may last one to two days.

Avoid food poisoning

1. Wash hands with soap and warm running water:
 - Before preparing food or eating;
 - Between handling raw and cooked foods;
 - After going to the toilet, smoking, using a tissue, working in the garden or playing with pets.
2. Thoroughly clean utensils, cutting boards and benches used in preparation of raw foods before using them with cooked or prepared foods.
3. As a routine practice, clean all benches, cutting boards and utensils with detergent and follow up with a sanitiser (which kills bacteria) such as hot water (above 77°C) or a commercial chemical sanitiser.
4. Keep perishable foods above 60°C or below 5°C.
5. Use airtight containers or plastic wrap to protect food from insects, rodents and other contaminants.

6. Avoid coughing, sneezing, spitting or blowing your nose around food and food preparation areas.
7. Food handlers are required to report to their supervisor if they have symptoms, or know that they are a carrier of a food borne illness. Such persons are obliged not to handle food until they are recovered or, if a carrier, free of the organism of concern.