

STAPHYLOCOCCAL FOOD POISONING (*Staphylococcus aureus*)

Your Questions Answered

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EAST CAMBRIDGESHIRE
DISTRICT COUNCIL

What is Staphylococcus?

Staphylococcus aureus is a common organism that lives harmlessly on the skin or in the nose of many healthy people. Sometimes, though, it can cause infection. Huge numbers are often present in boils, sores, wounds and acne. Occasionally other animals such as cows can transmit the bacteria.

How do I know that I have Staphylococcal food poisoning?

Diagnosis can only be confirmed by testing a sample of your faeces or vomit. This is usually at the request of your doctor.

How is it spread?

It is normally spread when these bacteria get onto food and are then allowed to reach high numbers. Food handlers are the main source of this contamination through poor personal hygiene standards. The risk of this is highest when people sneeze over the food or handle it with dirty or infected hands.

When these bacteria are given time to grow on food they can produce a heat resistant toxin that causes food poisoning. Keeping food not hot enough or cold enough will allow the bacteria to produce toxins that cause food poisoning. Once the toxins have formed they are difficult to destroy even by boiling.

The foods most often involved are cold cooked meats and poultry. Milk, cheese, dairy products. fish and shellfish have also been implicated in outbreaks.

What are the symptoms?

The toxin acts quickly to cause vomiting, abdominal cramps and often diarrhoea. Most people will recover on their own within 2 days. Rarely the illness may be so acute that sufferers faint or collapse. Sometimes when symptoms are severe people may need to be hospitalised.

How soon after exposure do symptoms appear?

The symptoms usually happen within 2-6 hours. They can range from 30 minutes to 8 hours.

Do infected people need to stay away from work or school?

All cases of gastroenteritis are regarded as potentially infectious. People should normally stay away from work or school until free from diarrhoea and vomiting. Inform your employer, child carer, nursery or school as soon as possible to help them identify if they may have an outbreak.

Infected people in 'high risk' groups must stay away while they have symptoms. This includes:

- food handlers involved with unwrapped or ready to eat food,
- staff of health care facilities in contact with food or patients,
- children aged below 5 years attending nurseries, playgroups, etc
- older children and adults who may find it difficult to implement good standards of personal hygiene

Such people may return to work or school when they have recovered, provided that they wash their hands thoroughly after using the toilet. Food handlers with septic cuts, boils, etc must not work with food until they have been successfully treated

How can I prevent the spread of infection?

Handwashing

This is the most important factor in preventing the spread of infection. Thoroughly wash your hands with soap in warm running water:

- AFTER using or cleaning the toilet
- AFTER touching anything contaminated by diarrhoea or vomiting
- AFTER attending to anybody who is unwell
- AFTER handling dirty laundry, clothing or bedding
- AFTER handling used nappies
- BEFORE handling, preparing, serving, or consuming food or drink

People who are ill should ideally use bactericidal liquid soap and separate towels or disposable paper tissues. A nailbrush can assist you to clean under your fingernails. Always dry your hands well as this helps to remove bacteria.

Cleaning the toilet

For as long as people are unwell:

- wipe the toilet seat with disinfectant after each use
- wash and disinfect other items like bedpans or potties after each use.
- use a cloth soaked in disinfectant to wipe the toilet seat, flush handle, washbasin taps, and door handle two or three times a day.
- clean the toilet bowl using a (toilet) brush and disinfectant. Rinse the brush by flushing the toilet, and replace in its holder .
- keep any rubber gloves used for cleaning the toilet for this use only.
- flush the toilet with the seat and lid down.

Laundry

- keep dirty laundry from anyone with food poisoning separate
- if possible remove any heavy soiling into the toilet before washing
- wash soiled clothing and bedding separately on as hot a washing programme as possible without exceeding fabric care instructions.

Points to remember

- make sure everybody follows these precautions
- assist young children to wash their hands properly

REMEMBER TO WASH YOUR HANDS FREQUENTLY

Further advice is available by contacting your Doctor or from:

East Cambridgeshire District Council
Environmental Services
The Grange
Nutholt Lane
Ely, Cambs CB7 4EE
Tel: 01353 665555
Fax: 01353 616223