

Suspected food-borne illness - information

Food-borne illness can be caused by a variety of different bacteria, by the toxins they produce, fungus or virus. These have different incubation periods (the time between eating the food and the appearance of the symptoms) and cause different symptoms. Food-borne illness is not always caused by the last meal eaten by a person and food contaminated with food poisoning bacteria will not necessarily look, taste or smell bad.

Signs and Symptoms:

Symptoms of food-borne illness include diarrhoea, nausea, vomiting, abdominal cramps, fever and headaches. A person suffering food-borne illness may have one or more of these symptoms. The incubation period may vary from one hour to as long as 3 to 4 days. Food-borne illness caused by pathogenic toxin poisoning or a virus may involve different symptoms, incubation periods and may last for a longer time period.

Treatment:

A doctor should be consulted to provide any treatment options necessary. Food-borne illnesses vary in severity depending on the organism associated with the illness and the amount of the organism that has been ingested by the person. Young children, the elderly and people who are already sick may display more severe symptoms. Food-borne illness can only be confirmed by a positive faecal sample. It is important that a faecal specimen is taken as this will assist with any investigation.

Transmission:

Some food-borne illnesses are able to be transmitted from one person to another. Germs can be easily transmitted in the air and on surfaces. One way to stop the spread is to wash hands carefully and regularly whenever they may have become contaminated.

Health outcome:

The duration of food-borne illness may vary from one to seven days. The symptoms and their severity can vary widely depending on the cause of the illness and the person affected.

Help and assistance:

A person who suspects they have a food-borne illness that they believe may have been caused by consumption of food from a food business should contact their local Population Health Unit. Environmental Health Officers can provide advice and obtain details to determine if an investigation is necessary. Investigation into the source of the illness may be important to prevent others becoming ill.

Other Resources

[Public Health Unit](https://www.health.qld.gov.au/system-governance/contact-us/contact/public-health-units) (<https://www.health.qld.gov.au/system-governance/contact-us/contact/public-health-units>)
contact details

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[Customer food complaint form](https://publications.qld.gov.au/dataset/food-safety-complaints/resource/633caa6e-eb6d-4043-a63d-f8fd9532c931)
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