



Take steps against foodborne illness

I got hit with a nasty bug last week, and I wonder if it might have been food poisoning. I'm OK now, but what kinds of food poisoning are most common, and what are the symptoms?

Generally, foodborne illness symptoms can be mild or severe, and include everything from upset stomach, abdominal cramps, nausea and vomiting, diarrhea, fever and dehydration.

Many times, it's difficult even for doctors to differentiate between foodborne illness and other types of gastrointestinal distress. But experts estimate that 48 million Americans each year become ill from contaminated food. So, it's a good idea to know where it's likely to come from and to take steps to prevent it.

To keep track of foodborne illness, the Foodborne Diseases Active Surveillance Network (or FoodNet, online at cdc.gov/foodnet) collects information from 10 states accounting for about 15 percent of the U.S. population. The system is designed to determine trends in foodborne illness: which bugs are declining and which are on the rise. The program is a collaboration between the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, ten state health departments, the U.S. Department of Agriculture's Food Safety and Inspection Service, and the Food and Drug Administration.

In the report card for 2013, released in April 2014, FoodNet revealed:

- Cases from Salmonella were down compared with 2010-2012, but this bug still caused the highest number of foodborne illness in the U.S.: 7,277 confirmed cases in the states covered by FoodNet in 2013. There are many different types of Salmonella. The most common type identified — 19 percent of the Salmonella cases in 2013 — was Salmonella enteritidis, associated with raw or undercooked eggs. Salmonella is also commonly associated with raw poultry and other meat, and also unpasteurized milk or juice, cheese, contaminated raw fruits and vegetables (such as alfalfa sprouts, melons), and even spices and nuts.

- Next on the FoodNet list was Campylobacter, which caused 6,621 confirmed illnesses. Campylobacter is also associated with raw and undercooked poultry and unpasteurized milk, as well as contaminated water.

To help prevent foodborne illness, the most important things to do are wash your hands and surfaces thoroughly after handling raw food, and cook meat and eggs thoroughly. For more guidance, see foodsafety.gov.

Chow Line is a service of Ohio State University's College of Food, Agricultural, and Environmental Sciences and its outreach and research arms, Ohio State University Extension and the Ohio Agricultural Research and Development Center. Send questions to Chow Line, c/o Martha Filipic, 2021 Coffey Road, Columbus, OH, 43210-1043, or filipic.3@osu.edu.



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July 18, 2014

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