

Loss Control



FARMERS

Information Bulletin

Foodborne Diseases

Infectious diseases spread through food or beverages are a common, distressing, and sometimes life-threatening problem for millions of people in the United States and around the world. The U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) estimates 76 million people suffer foodborne illnesses each year in the United States, accounting for 325,000 hospitalizations and more than 5,000 deaths.

Foodborne disease is extremely costly. Health experts estimate that the yearly cost of all foodborne diseases in this country is \$5 to \$6 billion in direct medical expenses and lost productivity. Infections with the bacteria *Salmonella* alone account for \$1 billion yearly in direct and indirect medical costs.

There are more than 250 known foodborne diseases. Bacteria cause the most cases, followed by viruses and parasites. Natural and manufactured chemicals in food products also can make people sick. Some diseases are caused by toxins (poisons) from the disease-causing organism, others by bodily reactions to the organism itself. People infected with foodborne germs may have no symptoms or develop symptoms ranging from mild intestinal discomfort to severe dehydration and bloody diarrhea.

Recently, public health, agriculture, and environmental officials have expressed growing concern over keeping the nation's food and water supply safe from terrorist acts. This bio-terrorism threat is being studied by a number of U.S. agencies, including the Food and Drug Administration, Department of Agriculture, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, Environmental Protection Agency, and National Institutes of Health.

The five primary foodborne diseases caused by bacteria are:

- *Botulism*
- *Campylobacteriosis*
- *Escherichia coli (E. coli) infection*

- *Salmonellosis*
- *Shigellosis*

PREVENTING FOODBORNE DISEASES

Many times, foodborne diseases are easy to avoid. These are some basic ways to prevent being infected by most foodborne germs.

- *Wash hands carefully before preparing food*
- *Wash hands, utensils, and kitchen surfaces with hot soapy water after they touch raw meat or poultry*
- *Cook beef and beef products thoroughly, especially hamburger*
- *Cook poultry and eggs thoroughly*
- *Eat cooked foods promptly and refrigerate leftovers within two hours after cooking*
- *Wash fruits and vegetables thoroughly, especially those that will be eaten raw*
- *Drink only pasteurized milk and juices and treated surface water*
- *Wash hands carefully after using the bathroom, changing infant diapers, or cleaning up animal feces*

Specific ways to avoid getting sick from foodborne organisms are described in supplemental Loss Control Information Bulletins on each of these foodborne diseases.

For More Information:

National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Diseases, National Institutes of Health:

<http://www.niaid.nih.gov>

U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, National Center for Infectious Diseases:

www.cdc.gov