

# Environmental Services Department

## Guidance on Infectious Disease

### Food Poisoning Information



#### **What is food poisoning?**

Food poisoning is any illness caused by eating food or drinking something which has been contaminated by certain bacteria, viruses, chemicals or metals.

#### **What are the symptoms?**

The typical symptoms of food poisoning may include: nausea, stomach pains, headache, diarrhoea, vomiting, high temperature or any combination of these.

#### **How did I get it?**

The most likely source of the illness is something you consumed up to a week before your symptoms started, although infections can also be passed from person to person or contracted from animals.

#### **Should I see a Doctor?**

Food poisoning usually clears up itself without any treatment but you should make sure you drink plenty of fluids until the symptoms have gone. However, if your symptoms persist and you are concerned, see your doctor for advice.

#### **What about work or school?**

You should stay away from work or school until you have had no diarrhoea or vomiting for at least 24 hours.

If your work involves handling food or you work with vulnerable groups e.g. healthcare and nursery staff you should not return to work until at least 48 hours after your symptoms have stopped.

You should also notify your employer and comply with company rules regarding clearance to work.

#### **How can I avoid passing it on?**

- **Always** wash and dry your hands thoroughly **after** using the toilet, handling soiled bedding/clothes, changing nappies and **before** eating and preparing food
- Ensure that door and toilet handles, taps and loo seats are cleaned regularly

## **Why is Environmental Health involved?**

Your doctor will advise Environmental Health if you are thought to have food poisoning to enable an investigation to be carried out. The investigation may be done by telephone or by completing a postal questionnaire. In some circumstances you may be asked to submit a stool (motion) sample to the hospital for analysis.

## **What can I do to prevent it happening again?**

- Always wash your hands with soapy water:
  - before preparing food.
  - after handling raw foods and before going on to handle cooked foods.
  - after handling or stroking pets.
- Always cook food thoroughly. Avoid eating raw eggs.
- Preferably do not re-heat food. Where this is unavoidable re-heat the food only once and ensure that it is piping hot.
- Store raw and cooked foods separately. Always store cooked foods above raw foods in the refrigerator.
- Do not use the same equipment for preparing raw and cooked foods.
- Take chilled or frozen food home quickly, preferably in a cool bag or box. This is particularly important during warm weather and if the food is to be left in a warm car, even for a short period.
- Keep ready to eat perishable foods such as cooked meats, dairy products, chilled meals, etc refrigerated at all times.
- Keep your 'fridge' at the correct temperature, preferably below 5°C. You can check this by using a fridge thermometer.
- Check the date on goods; use food within the recommended period.

If you would like any further information, please contact:

Wigan Council  
Environmental Services Department  
Business Compliance Section  
Unity House  
Westwood Park Drive  
Wigan  
WN3 4HE

Telephone: 01942 828142