A foodborne illness is any illness caused by eating food that has been contaminated by bacteria, viruses, toxins, or chemicals. Contaminated food may not smell, taste, or appear unusual in any way. This brochure will provide you with information to help you determine if you may have a foodborne illness, how to prevent foodborne illness in the future, and where to go for more information.

Symptoms:

- Symptoms of foodborne illness usually include nausea, vomiting, diarrhea, and stomach cramps. Fish toxins and poisons may produce neurological symptoms (e.g. sensation of burning or "pins and needles", weakness).

- Symptoms may be more severe in people who are at higher risk for infections: young children, the elderly, and people with long-term health conditions.

Incubation Period:

- The time between eating the contaminated food and becoming ill is called the incubation period.

- This period can range from a few minutes to several weeks depending on the cause. Most foodborne illnesses produce symptoms within 48 hours.

Foodborne illness can be broken down into two categories:

1. Food Intoxications:

- This is what people commonly refer to as food poisoning, where the cause is a toxin or poison. The incubation period is usually 2-12 hours and the illness commonly lasts 1-2 days.

Sources of toxins include:

- Bacteria: Bacteria can grow on food and produce toxins which are not destroyed by cooking, causing vomiting or diarrhea when the contaminated food is consumed. Toxins are usually the result of improper storage temperatures (e.g. leaving food at room temperature).

- Fish toxins: Scombroid fish poisoning results from eating fish that has been improperly stored or processed. Once formed, the toxin (histamine) can cause illness even if the fish is frozen, cooked, or eaten raw.

- Fish poisons: Ciguatoxin is produced by organisms that grow on marine algae in reefs. The poison gets into fish when they feed on the algae.

2. Food Infections:

- This type of foodborne illness requires the growth of the organism in your body to make you sick. The incubation period is usually 12-36 hours or longer and the illness commonly lasts 2-3 days.

Infections include:

- Bacterial: Many bacteria (*Salmonella, E. coli, Listeria, Campylobacter*) may be on food when purchased. The bacteria can be spread by food workers in restaurants or cross-contamination at home. Most bacteria can be killed by cooking food to the recommended temperature.

- Viral: Viruses (hepatitis A, norovirus, rotavirus) can be spread from infected people through food or contaminated surfaces. Once inside the body, the virus multiplies and causes illness.

HAWAI'I DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH

How Can I Avoid Getting Sick from a Foodborne Illness?

- **Clean:** Always wash your hands before eating or preparing food, after handling raw meat, and after using the bathroom. Also, wash your hands after changing diapers and cleaning up after pets. Clean utensils, cutting boards, and countertops with soap and water before and after preparing food.

- **Chill:** Don't leave foods sitting out at room temperature. Refrigerate foods promptly after serving.

- **Cook:** Cook meats to recommended temperatures. Use a food thermometer to make sure the recommended temperature has been reached.

- **Rinse:** Wash all fresh fruits and vegetables thoroughly before eating.

- **Separate:** Keep raw meats and their juices away from other foods to prevent cross-contamination.

What Should I Do If I Get Sick?

- In healthy people, most foodborne illnesses resolve in a few days. However, seek medical attention if you have severe diarrhea or vomiting, bloody diarrhea, extremely high fever or fever lasting more than 2 days, numbness, or difficulty breathing. A stool sample is required to determine what made you sick.

- Prompt reporting of foodborne illness to the Department of Health can help detect outbreaks and reduce the number of people who become ill.

- Health Department staff will ask about what you ate the 48 hours before you got sick. Write it down!

- Health Department staff from the Disease Investigation Branch can answer your questions Monday through Friday (7:45 am – 4:30 pm).

All non-emergency after hours messages will be returned on the next business day.

**We provide access to our activities without regard to race, color, national origin (including language), age, sex, religion, or disability. Write or call our Affirmative Action Officer at Box 3378, Honolulu, HI 96801-3378 or at (808) 586-4616 (voice) within 180 days of a problem.

HAWAII STATE DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH

Foodborne Illness Reporting Line

O'ahu.....(808)586-4586

Mainland and Neighbor Islands.....1-800-360-2575

After hours/ emergencies.....(808)566-5049