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Foodborne illnesses can be caused by several types of harmful bacteria, viruses, and parasites, as well as other causes. With more than 48 million cases of foodborne illnesses estimated in the United States each year, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), many can be prevented by storing food properly, using good handwashing, following appropriate food handling practices, and thorough cooking.

Symptoms and how quickly they develop vary anywhere from hours to days after ingestion, depending upon the cause and how much was consumed. Common symptoms include upset stomach, stomach cramping, nausea, vomiting, diarrhea, and fever. Because the symptoms may appear days after consuming the tainted food, the cause can be difficult to determine. To help to prevent other people from becoming ill, it is important to report any potential foodborne illness to local health authorities.

Incident Review #1

A 14-year-old Scout was playing Frisbee on the beach after returning from a six-day sailing excursion with his troop when he became violently ill. He vomited several times and was taken to the health lodge, where he continued to vomit for more than 30 minutes. Initially dehydration was thought to be the issue, but he had earlier complaints of nausea and diarrhea for over eight hours. He was transported to the local hospital and was diagnosed with a foodborne illness.



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- Wipe down all food preparation areas before, during, and after each meal.
- Good handwashing for at least 20 seconds with soap and clean running water is the best method to rid your hands of germs. When water is not available, then use alcohol-based gel hand sanitizer that contains at least 60 percent alcohol.
- Wash your hands before, during, and after meal preparation. Wash them before eating and after using the toilet. Wash them after touching garbage and after coughing, sneezing, or blowing your nose.

The CDC estimates that 1 in 6 Americans will get sick from eating contaminated food this year.



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Key Points

- Contamination can occur at various points during food preparation. If the Scout preparing the meal is ill, then those germs may end up being spread to everyone. Changing the duty roster and getting medical care for the ill Scout are needed to head off this possible cause.
- Wash food preparation tools, pots, pans, utensils, and all dishes with the three-pot method, as described in the *Boy Scout Handbook*.



4 STEPS TO FOOD SAFETY

CLEAN—Wash your hands and surfaces often.

SEPARATE—Don't cross-contaminate.

COOK—Thoroughly cook foods to the proper temperature. Use a thermometer.

CHILL—Keep foods cold (below 40 degrees F).

Incident Review #2

A 17-year-old female camp staff employee arrived at the health lodge requesting some over-the-counter antacid medication for what she thought was acid reflux. During her visit it was determined that she had been ill for over 24 hours with stomach pain and severe diarrhea. She described her stomach pain as “stabbing” and also complained that she was unable to drink or eat anything because of the vomiting. Her temperature was elevated. She was taken to the hospital where she was diagnosed with a bacterial foodborne illness. The county health department was notified by the hospital staff.



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Key Points

- Symptoms such as those described in this incident were severe. Deciding when to get medical care can be difficult sometimes, especially for laypeople. The following symptoms should all be evaluated quickly: nausea and frequent vomiting (that prevents eating solids or drinking liquids), persistent diarrhea, blood in stools, fever, dehydration (as indicated by decreased urine output), or dizziness.
- Separating a symptomatic individual until a diagnosis can be determined and quarantining the group the patient encountered are necessary steps to preventing transmission. Individuals or groups are then monitored for symptoms until medical personnel determine isolation is no longer necessary.
- Using the Pre-Event Medical Screening Checklist before leaving for camp can be helpful in making sure that every participant—youth and adult—is healthy enough for the trip.

Incident Review #3

A 12-year-old Scout began complaining of stomach pain, severe vomiting, and diarrhea. He was taken to an urgent care facility nearby and then transferred to a hospital. He was diagnosed with norovirus and was isolated in the hospital. The health department and camp staff were notified. Health department and hospital recommendations for cleaning the camp and isolating individuals that may have been in contact with the Scout were adopted immediately.

Key Points

- Prevention of norovirus follows the same recommendations as for other foodborne illnesses: washing hands before, during, and after meal preparation; using good hand hygiene especially after using the toilet; and washing fruits and vegetables well and cooking foods thoroughly to the proper temperature.
- Cleaning contaminated surfaces and clothing after an incident of vomiting or diarrhea is key to prevent spread of a virus. Camps or fixed locations should have a dedicated response kit stocked with appropriate supplies. Units should consider carrying a minimum trash or biohazard bags.
- Protect those who clean up by providing appropriate personal protective equipment, which could include gloves, face masks and glasses, booties for shoes, and suits or an apron.

Discussion Questions

- Do you review proper food preparation, storage, and cleaning techniques before each campout?
- What measures are in place with your group to ensure proper food storage?
- Who is responsible for the cooking equipment you utilize?
- How do leaders set good examples with correct handwashing, food preparation, and storage?
- An individual throws up during your unit campout at a state park. How would you isolate that individual?
- How does your unit conduct a health check before leaving for camp?

Resources

- Centers for Disease Control and Prevention—Keep Food Safe: www.cdc.gov/foodsafety/keep-food-safe.html
- Centers for Disease Control and Prevention—How Food Gets Contaminated: www.cdc.gov/foodsafety/production-chain.html
- Centers for Disease Control and Prevention—Handwashing: Clean Hands Save Lives: www.cdc.gov/handwashing/when-how-handwashing.html
- Centers for Disease Control and Prevention—Preventing Norovirus Infection: www.cdc.gov/norovirus/preventing-infection.html
- *Boy Scout Handbook*
- Pre-Event Medical Screening Checklist: www.scouting.org/filestore/HealthSafety/pdf/680-102_PreEventChklist.pdf