

STAPHYLOCOCCUS AUREUS

(staf'i-lō-kok'-es) (au'rē-ŭs)

Overview

Staphylococcus aureus bacteria are found in water, dust and the air, but food handlers are the main source of food contamination. At least 30% of healthy people have *Staphylococcus aureus* bacteria living in their nasal passages and on their hair and skin. Without good hygiene, these bacteria can easily end up in the foods we eat. Given the right environment, *Staphylococcus aureus* can multiply rapidly at room temperature, producing a toxin that is responsible for the condition known as staphylococcal food poisoning.

Sources

Staphylococcus aureus bacteria can be found in processed meat products, such as ham and sausage, poultry, eggs, milk and dairy products. Foods that require a lot of handling and preparation work and reheating, such as egg, tuna, chicken, potato and macaroni salads, also are susceptible to *Staphylococcus aureus* contamination. Although food handlers are the main source of staphylococcal food poisoning, equipment and surfaces are also common contamination sites.

Symptoms/Complications

Severe nausea and vomiting, occasionally accompanied by abdominal cramps and diarrhea, can occur one to six hours after eating food contaminated with *Staphylococcus aureus* bacteria. In more severe cases, muscle cramping and blood pressure and pulse rate changes may occur.

Control Measures

The Partnership for Food Safety Education recommends following these four simple steps to Fight BAC!® (bacteria):



Clean

Always wash hands in hot, soapy water for 20 seconds before preparing or eating food, and after using the bathroom, changing diapers and handling pets. Wash cutting boards, counter tops, knives and utensils in hot, soapy water after they come in contact with raw meat, poultry and seafood, and before preparing other foods. Be sure to wash away all soil from vegetables by scrubbing them under clean, drinkable water. Since staphylococcal food poisoning has been linked to poor hygiene of people who handle food, it's very important to keep food preparation areas clean and to always practice good personal hygiene.



Separate

Bacteria can spread from one food to another through cross-contamination. To decrease the risk of cross-contamination, keep raw meat, poultry and seafood—and their juices—away from ready-to-eat foods, such as fruits and vegetables. If possible, use one cutting board for raw meat products and another for salads and other ready-to-eat foods. Never place cooked food on a plate that previously held raw meat, poultry or seafood.



Cook

Although cooking will easily destroy *Staphylococcus aureus* bacteria, the toxins that are produced in the food and cause illness are relatively heat stable. Therefore, the way to control *Staphylococcus* is to minimize food handling, keep food out of the danger zone (40°F to 140°F) and practice good personal hygiene.



Chill

Staphylococcus aureus grows at room temperatures, so keep foods out of the danger zone. Cold foods should be kept at or below 40°F. Prepared salads, such as egg and chicken, should also be purchased from refrigerated cases or else refrigerated promptly after preparation at home. Refrigerate or freeze prepared food and leftovers within two hours. Carefully follow “keep refrigerated,” “sell by” and “use by” dates.

Other Measures

Individuals with compromised immune systems should consult a physician regarding special food and food safety recommendations.

Resources

For further information, contact:

The American Dietetic Association
Consumer Nutrition Hotline
(800) 366-1655
(recorded messages, fact sheets
and referrals to dietitians)
<http://www.eatright.org>

Centers for Disease Control
and Prevention
Foodborne Illness Line
24-hour recorded information
(888) 232-3228
<http://www.cdc.gov>

FDA Center for Food Safety
and Applied Nutrition
Food Safety Line
24-hour recorded information
(800) 332-4010
<http://vm.cfsan.fda.gov>

National Cattlemen’s
Beef Association
<http://www.beef.org>

National Food Safety Database
<http://www.foodsafety.org>

National Restaurant Association
<http://www.restaurant.org>

National Restaurant Association
Educational Foundation
<http://www.edfound.org>

Partnership for Food Safety Education
Fight BAC!®
<http://www.fightbac.org>

USDA Meat and Poultry Hotline
Mon – Fri, 10am – 4pm ET
(800) 535-4555
<http://www.fsis.usda.gov>
<http://www.foodsafety.gov>

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