

## Remember

- Clean hands are hands that are washed with soap and water for 20 seconds and thoroughly dried on a clean dry cloth towel or disposable paper towel for a further 20 seconds.
- Use safe food handling practices
- Avoid directly handling foods, use tongs or other utensils
- Cuts, abrasions and sores on the face or arms must be covered with waterproof dressings. Sores on the hands should be covered with a dressing covered by a glove.
- Cook foods thoroughly
- Store foods at or below 4°C.
- Once cooked, keep hot foods above 60°C
- Cool hot foods quickly (use shallow trays).
- Cool cooked salads such as potato salad before adding dressing.
- Avoid leaving food at room temperature during preparation or display.

For more information contact  
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## Auckland Regional Public Health Service

Rātonga Hauora ā Iwi o Tamaki Makaurau



Working with the people of Auckland, Counties Manukau and Waitemata

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# Staphylococcal Food Poisoning

a foodborne illness  
carried by people



# Staphylococcal Food Poisoning

## What is it?

Staphylococcal food poisoning is caused by *Staphylococcus aureus* bacteria. Food can become contaminated with the bacteria by food-handlers during food preparation. If the food is then not kept either hot or refrigerated, the bacteria will multiply.

As they grow, they produce a poison or toxin that causes illness in people when the food is eaten. Cooking the food destroys the bacteria but not the toxin it produces.

## What are the symptoms?

Illness occurs abruptly after eating the contaminated food, typically within 30 minutes to 7 hours. Symptoms are severe nausea, stomach cramps, vomiting and diarrhoea. In severe cases, there may also be headache, muscle cramps, weakness and even collapse. Symptoms generally last 1 to 2 days.

## How is it treated?

Generally, the body's own defences will overcome the illness. People with severe vomiting can become dehydrated so extra liquids are recommended. Those with severe symptoms should consult their doctor.

## How is it spread?

Staphylococcal bacteria can be present in the nose and throat and on the hair and skin of healthy people but are found in large numbers in boils, open skin sores and burns, eye infections, and cuts.

Food handlers can transfer the bacteria to the food via their hands or by coughing or sneezing on food.

Foods high in protein and carbohydrate, and those that require a lot of handling during preparation are particularly high risk. Foods handled after cooking are also at risk. Examples include:

- Bakery products such as custard pies or cream filled pastries
- Sandwich fillings
- Salads and coleslaw
- Cold cooked meats, hams, salamis, smoked or salted seafood
- Potato, egg and pasta salads

## How to prevent it?

- Cover your nose and mouth when coughing and sneezing to prevent staphylococcal contamination.
- Strict hand hygiene is important. Clean hands thoroughly:
  - ▶ After touching or blowing the nose or coughing
  - ▶ After going to the toilet
  - ▶ Before handling food
- Clean hands are hands that are washed with soap and water for 20 seconds and thoroughly dried on a clean dry cloth towel or disposable paper towel for a further 20 seconds.