

Food Poisoning is a common, usually mild, but sometimes deadly illness. Typical symptoms include nausea, vomiting, abdominal cramping and diarrhoea that come on suddenly within 48hrs of consuming the contaminated food or drink. Depending on the contaminant, fever and chills, bloody stools, dehydration, and nervous system damage may follow.

- ◆ According to the Centers of Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) salmonella organism which is one of the most common bacterial forms of infection accounts for one billion dollars in medical costs and lost work time that's in the USA alone.
- ◆ Worldwide, diarrhoeal illnesses are among the leading causes of death. Travellers to developing countries often encounter food poisoning in the form of traveller's diarrhoea or "Montezuma's revenge." Additionally, there are new global threats to the world's food supply through terrorist action using food toxins as weapons.

CAUSES OF FOOD POISONING

The known causes of food poisoning can be divided into two categories, infective agents and toxic agents.

- ◆ Infective agents include Viruses, bacteria, and parasites.
- ◆ Toxic agents include poisonous mushrooms, improperly prepared foods (such as barracuda), or pesticides on fruits and vegetables.

Some of the infective & toxic agents are Norwalk virus, Rotavirus, Salmonellae, Staphylococcus, Shigell or traveller's Diarrhoea, Botulism, Clostridium, Vibrio Cholerae, E. coli, Ciguatera poisoning, Mushroom toxins, Scombroid and Pesticides with Rotavirus being the most common in children and Norwalk virus being the most common over all of the infective agents while Ciguatera poisoning and pesticides are the most common of the toxic agents.

SIGNS AND SYMPTOMS

Some of the symptoms associated with food poisoning are nausea, fever, vomiting, loss of appetite, abdominal cramping and diarrhoea, headaches, dizziness, itchy skin, increased production of silver and shaking of legs & arms, rapid heart beat,

WHO IS AT RISK?

Food poisoning does not discriminate against race, creed or any one's financial status; it can affect any one from an infant to the elderly.

Here is a table indicating the number of cases food poisoning recorded in Antigua & Barbuda for the period 2002-2006

Table 1: Number of Food Poisoning cases recorded in Antigua & Barbuda for the period 2002-2006

Years	Gender			Total
	Male	Female	N/S	
2002	90	111	6	207
2003	93	124	6	223
2004	120	128	2	250
2005	93	107	0	200
2006	115	145	0	260
Total	511	615	14	1140

* N/S – Not Stated

TREATMENT

The main treatment for food poisoning is putting fluids back in the body (the process of rehydration) through an intravenous line or by drinking. You may need to be admitted to the hospital. This depends on the severity of the dehydration, your response to therapy, and your ability to drink fluids without vomiting. Children, in particular, may need close observation.

Antivomiting and diarrhea medications may be given; the doctor may also treat any fever to make you more comfortable.

PREVENTION

Food poisoning is best prevented by taking care when selecting, preparing and eating food. Always wash hands before preparing or serving foods. When purchasing food in jars or cans check carefully to make sure that they are not dented or swollen, or jars with loose or swollen lids. Refrigerate perishable food immediately and place raw meat and poultry in the coldest section of the refrigerator. If you have nausea, vomiting, abdominal cramping and diarrhoea, or have a sore on your hands, have someone else prepare the food.

CONCLUSION

Remember that one ounce of prevention is better than one pound of cure.

SOURCE: <http://www.emedicinehealth.com>
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