A CUP OF HEALTH WITH CDC

Safe Food

Surveillance for Foodborne Disease Outbreaks – United States, 2009-2010
Recorded: February 12, 2013; posted: February 14, 2013

[Announcer] This program is presented by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

[Dr. Gaynes] Welcome to *A Cup of Health with CDC*, a weekly feature of the *MMWR*, the Morbidity and Mortality Weekly Report. I'm your host, Dr. Robert Gaynes.

A healthy diet is important, but if food is mishandled or improperly prepared, a wholesome meal can result in a severe illness.

Dr. Hannah Gould is an epidemiologist with CDC's Division of Foodborne, Waterborne, and Environmental Diseases. She's joining us today to discuss ways to avoid foodborne illnesses. Welcome to the show, Hannah.

[Dr. Gould] Thank you. I'm glad to be here

[Dr. Gaynes] Hannah, how common is foodborne illness in the United States?

[Dr. Gould] Very common. We estimate that one in six Americans is sick each year with a foodborne illness.

[Dr. Gaynes] In the last two years, which foods have been linked to outbreaks most often?

[Dr. Gould] There's four foods that have been linked to many outbreaks in the last two years. These include beef; poultry, such as chicken and turkey; milk, particularly milk that hasn't been pasteurized; and fish.

[Dr. Gaynes] Is there any way to determine if a food item is contaminated?

[Dr. Gould] No. Unfortunately, you just can't tell by looking or smelling a food whether it's been contaminated. I mean, sometimes you can tell if your potato salad is growing something funky, but you shouldn't use that as an indicator as whether your food is safe to eat or not.

[Dr. Gaynes] So how can we decrease our chance of getting sick from our food?

[Dr. Gould] There's four main things that we recommend you can do – clean, separate, cook, and chill. So, let's talk about cleaning first. Wash your hands with soap and water, wash your cutting boards after you've handled meat, wash your kitchen counters after handling meat and before cutting your vegetables. Separate your foods. You want to keep your meat away from your vegetables, and that applies to your refrigerator, when you're

cutting things on your counters, and even at the grocery store, in your shopping cart. You also want to make sure you cook your food well. Use a food thermometer; make sure that your meat is cooked to the right temperature, for example. And also, once your food is hot, keep it hot until you're ready to put those leftovers away. And then finally, chill your food. You want to make sure that your refrigerator is cold enough to keep your food cold and you want to keep your food cold in your refrigerator until you're ready to serve it again.

[Dr. Gaynes] Hannah, if a person thinks they have a foodborne illness, when should they consider seeing their health care provider?

[Dr. Gould] Foodborne illness certainly is never fun but usually it's mild and will go away on its own after a couple days. Of course there's some people, like children, the elderly, or people who have chronic or immunocompromising conditions that will definitely want to call their health care provider to make sure they're okay. And then for anyone who has questions or if it doesn't get better or gets worse, you should definitely consider seeing your health care provider.

[Dr. Gaynes] Where can listeners get more information about foodborne illnesses?

[Dr. Gould] A great resource with more information is foodsafety.gov.

[Dr. Gaynes] Thanks, Hannah. I've been talking today with CDC's Dr. Hannah Gould about ways to avoid foodborne illnesses.

Remember, the food groups most commonly linked to outbreaks include beef, dairy, fish, and poultry. When preparing food, make sure all cooking surfaces are clean, keep cold foods properly chilled, thoroughly wash fruits and vegetables and keep them separated from meat, and be sure that meats are cooked to an appropriate temperature.

Until next time, be well. This is Dr. Robert Gaynes for *A Cup of Health with CDC*.

[Announcer] For the most accurate health information, visit www.cdc.gov or call 1-800-CDC-INFO.