

How can we prevent Staph aureus food poisoning?



Staph aureus food poisoning can be avoided by preventing food from becoming contaminated with the bacterium, and also by preventing growth of the bacterium on food so that the toxin is not formed. Key points to remember are:

■ **Ensure food handlers maintain high standards of personal hygiene. Thorough handwashing is essential, as is the need to cover wounds or skin infections with waterproof dressings and to remove staff with severe coughs and colds from food**

handling duties.

■ **Food preparation surfaces should be cleaned and disinfected thoroughly before use.**

■ **Keep hot food hot (above 63°C) and cold food cold (below 5°C). This will ensure that any Staph aureus present in the food is unable to grow, and so prevent the toxin from being formed. Any time outside these temperatures must be kept to a minimum.**

■ **The toxin is very heat resistant - even boiling for an hour may not destroy it! So it is important that even foods that are still to be cooked are stored at safe temperatures.**

Case study:

A club in Babergh District hosted a large scale event which included a cold buffet lunch. Two hours after the lunch one of the guests began to vomit, and over the following seven hours another eleven guests became unwell with one or more of the symptoms of nausea, vomiting and diarrhoea. Most had recovered by the following day, although one person remained unwell for three days.

The food had been prepared by one of the club members at their home. Some of the menu items, including some cooked chicken in sauce, had been prepared the day before and stored at room temperature overnight.

The onset time and symptoms were consistent with Staphylococcus aureus food poisoning, which may have arisen from storage of some of the menu items at room temperature. However, the absence of any specimens from the cases or leftover food made it impossible to confirm Staphylococcus aureus as the cause.

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