

What causes food poisoning?

Gastroenteritis or food poisoning is a frequent cause of diarrhoea in the community. The causes for food poisoning can be bacterial or viral agents. Viral gastroenteritis is estimated to be responsible for 25 per cent to 40 per cent of hospital admissions for the illness. The Straits Times takes a look at the causes and symptoms.

CAUSES



Ingestion of food or water contaminated by bacteria or viruses



Improperly cooked food

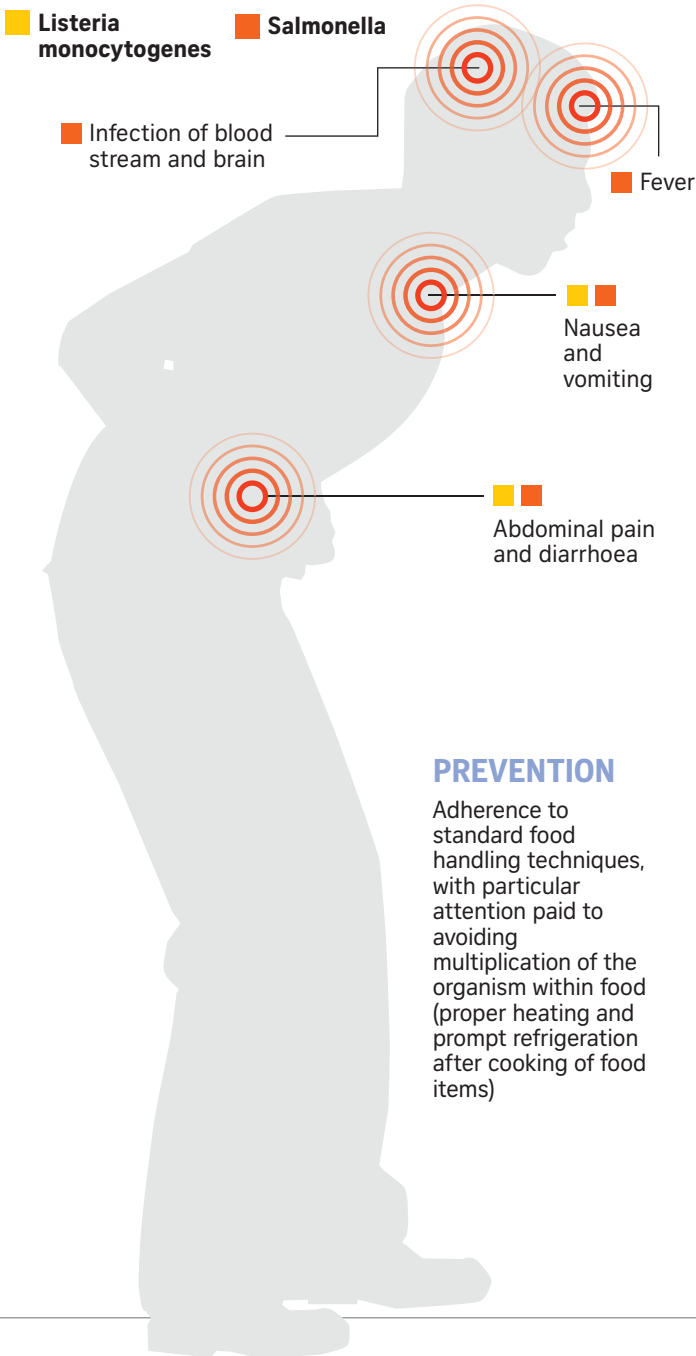


Mishandled food



Food left unrefrigerated for a long period before consumption. Warm temperatures stimulate bacteria to grow and multiply

SYMPTOMS



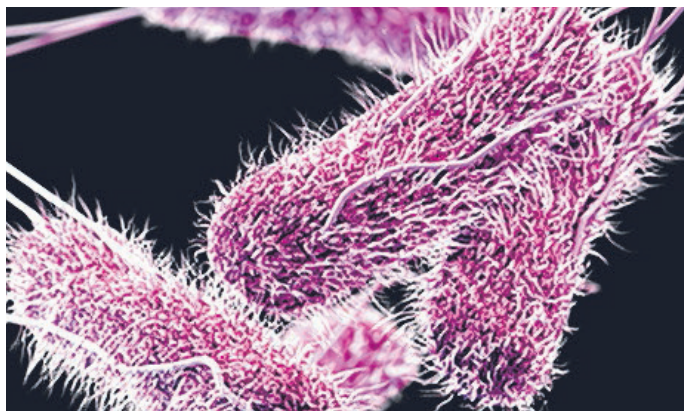
BACTERIAL

While parasites like tapeworms are rare in Singapore, raw or partly cooked foods can harbour bacteria and viruses that cause food poisoning.

Salmonella

A genus of bacteria that is a major cause of food-borne illness throughout the world. The illness people get from a Salmonella infection is called Salmonellosis.

Medical illustration of Salmonella bacteria



WHERE IT IS FOUND



In all kinds of raw and partly cooked food, including meat and eggs.



TREATMENT

- The incubation period is usually 12 to 36 hours, although it can be as long as 72 hours.
- Illness usually lasts four to seven days and most people recover without treatment.
- Electrolyte replacement and rehydration for severe cases.
- However, in the very young and the elderly, and in cases when the bacteria enters the bloodstream, antibiotic treatment may be needed.

Escherichia coli

WHERE IT IS FOUND



Often in undercooked ground beef, raw milk, vegetables and cheese. Some rare strains can cause severe illness and kidney failure.

Listeria monocytogenes

Listeriosis is a type of food poisoning caused by the Listeria monocytogenes bacterium. Listeria is found in the environment, such as in soil, water and faeces. People get listeriosis most commonly through contaminated food sources.

Medical illustration of Listeria monocytogenes bacterium



WHERE IT IS FOUND



In raw milk and cheese – especially soft cheese. Can also be found in raw vegetables, as well as raw meat and processed deli meat products like sausages.

TREATMENT

- It is treatable with antibiotics if diagnosed early.

Campylobacter

WHERE IT IS FOUND



In undercooked meat products and raw milk. Has an incubation period of one to seven days, and causes diarrhoea, with stools that are often bloody or stained with bile.

VIRAL

Viruses can cause food-poisoning incidents too. Here are two of the common culprits:

Norovirus

Goodwood Park Hotel's bakery had its licence suspended in April 2016 after at least 76 food-poisoning cases were linked to its popular durian pastries. Two food handlers there tested positive for norovirus.

Rotavirus

Caused at least 180 cases of gastroenteritis in the Owen Road area in 2016 and led to the temporary closure of Pek Kio Market and Food Centre.