

# Tips for food safety

*Dunham Army Health Clinic*

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March 24, 2009 -- Food handling safety risks are more common than most people think. As many as a quarter of Americans suffer a foodborne illness each year, though only a fraction of those cases get linked to high profile outbreaks like the recent salmonella peanut scare.

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) estimates that foodborne diseases cause approximately 76 million illnesses, 325,000 hospitalizations, and 5,000 deaths in the United States each year. The next time you have a case of diarrhea that lasts a day or more, chances are better than one in three that it is food illness related. Common symptoms are serious diarrhea that lasts at least a day and possible nausea, vomiting and/or stomach cramps.

Four easy steps that you can do to help your family be food safe:

- **CLEAN:** Bacteria can spread throughout the kitchen and get on hands, cutting boards, knives, and counter tops. Frequent cleaning with soap and hot water can reduce risk.
- **SEPARATE:** Cross-contamination is how bacteria spread. Keep raw meat, poultry and seafood and their juices away from ready-to-eat foods.
- **COOK:** Even for experienced cooks, the improper heating and preparation of food means bacteria can survive. Use a food thermometer. Stir, rotate the dish, and cover food when microwaving. Bring sauces, soups, and gravies to a rolling boil when reheating.
- **CHILL:** Bacteria spread fastest at temperatures between 40°F and 140°F, so chilling food through this temperature danger zone within 2 hours is one of the most effective ways to reduce the risk of foodborne illness.

To find out more about food safety, visit the US Department of Agriculture web site [www.befoodsafe.gov](http://www.befoodsafe.gov) or the CDC at <http://www.cdc.gov/foodsafety/>.