

Environmental Assessment— Guide to Bacterial Intoxications



Bacterial food intoxication, or food poisoning, is a foodborne illness caused by the ingestion of food containing preformed bacterial toxins. Food can become contaminated with bacteria, and toxins may form while the bacteria multiply from time and/or temperature abuse. Contamination of the food may come from people, but the illness is not spread person-to-person. Some examples of bacteria that can form toxins with time and/or temperature abuse include **Staphylococcus aureus**, **Bacillus cereus**, **Clostridium perfringens** and **Clostridium botulinum**.

Some key items to focus on while investigating a suspected bacterial intoxication:

- **Interview and observe**—Interview management and employees regarding their food preparation practices of suspect food. Observe the preparation and cooking process of the suspect food from start to finish, including the monitoring of internal cooking temperatures and cooling procedures of the suspect food.
- **Obtain restaurant menu**—Ask whether the establishment had any specials on the date in question.
- **Review food flows**—Determine the potential for time and/or temperature abuse of suspect food items, especially when food is cooked and cooled for service on another day or multiple days.
- **Review temperature logs**—Examine available logs for issues.
- **Assess**—Cooling, reheating and temperature holding practices. Assess menu items that are cooked and cooled for service on another day or on multiple days.
- **Review hand hygiene**—Note any issues with handwashing and bare hand contact with ready-to-eat foods. Look for open cuts and sores on employee hands and arms.
- **Provide corrective actions**—Discuss and correct improper food safety practices while onsite.
- **Collect samples**—Determine if any suspect food item remains at the establishment. If yes, notify the Indiana Department of Health and discuss if sampling would be appropriate. The Food Protection Division may assist with the coordination, collection and transport of food samples.

When investigating bacterial intoxications at a food establishment, focus on food handling practices of time and/or temperature abuse (improper holding, improper cooling, improper cooking) and improper hand hygiene of food handlers.

Indiana is a voluntary participant with the CDC's National Environmental Assessment Reporting System (NEARS). Please visit the CDC's [NEARS](#) website for more information. Please contact the Indiana Department of Health Food Protection Division Rapid Response Team for assistance with the environmental assessment and completing NEARS forms, sampling supplies and any other questions regarding the environmental response for a suspected bacterial intoxication.

For assistance, please contact:

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