



PUBLIC HEALTH FACT SHEET

Boston Public Health Commission
Communicable Disease Control Division
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Clostridium perfringens

What is *Clostridium perfringens*?

Clostridium perfringens is bacteria that can infect the bowel in people and animals. The illness that results from a toxin produced by the bacteria is called *Clostridium perfringens* enteritis. Most people infected with these bacteria do not get severe illness. However, in rare cases the infection can cause symptoms.

What are the symptoms of *Clostridium perfringens*?

Illness usually begins suddenly and includes watery diarrhea and abdominal pain. There is usually no fever. Symptoms appear between six and 24 hours after ingestion and last approximately 24 hours. The illness is most serious for the elderly.

How is *Clostridium perfringens* spread?

The *Clostridium perfringens* toxin must be swallowed to cause disease. This usually happens when someone eats food that has been stored at the wrong temperature after cooking. *Clostridium perfringens* is found in the stool (feces) of infected people.

What kinds of food are most likely to be contaminated?

Clostridium perfringens is most commonly found in meat, poultry, cooked dried beans and gravies. Because the bacteria also live in the soil, contamination from unwashed vegetables is also possible.

How is *Clostridium perfringens* diagnosed and treated?

Most cases are diagnosed based on symptoms. In some cases, a stool sample may be sent for laboratory testing. It takes several days to get the results from the test. Most people get well without any treatment, but some people can get very sick.

Are there any health regulations for people with *Clostridium perfringens*?

Health care providers are required by law to report cases of food poisoning, including those caused by *Clostridium perfringens* to the local board of health. In Boston, cases are reported to the Boston Public Health Commission at 617-534-5611.

How can I prevent *Clostridium perfringens* and other foodborne illness?

- Always wash your hands thoroughly with soap and water before eating, before handling food, after using the toilet, after changing diapers and after handling your pets or cleaning up after them.
- Cook all food from animal sources thoroughly, especially poultry. If the meat or poultry is still pink in the center, it is not cooked enough.
- When serving foods buffet-style, keep hot foods hot and cold foods cold. Leftover portions of foods should be divided up for storage and cooled in a refrigerator rather than being left at room temperature.

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- Wash all fruits and vegetables before eating.
- Carefully follow “keep refrigerated,” “sell by” and “use by” dates.
- Use only clean utensils, dishes and cutting boards to prepare food that is already cooked or will be eaten raw.
- Anything you use to prepare raw meat, seafood, or poultry (including your hands and the table or counter top), should be washed thoroughly before you touch any other food.
- If you are taking care of someone who has diarrhea, scrub your hands with plenty of soap and water after cleaning the bathroom, helping the person use the toilet, or changing diapers, soiled clothes or soiled sheets.
- If you or your child has persistent diarrhea (with or without a fever), or if the diarrhea is severe or contains blood, call your doctor or health center for advice.

**For more information, please contact
Boston Public Health Commission
Communicable Disease Control
(617) 534-5611 or www.bphc.org**