

Foodborne Illness Outbreaks Q&A

What is a foodborne illness outbreak?

The Washington State Department of Health defines a foodborne illness outbreak as “Two or more persons experiencing a similar illness after ingestion of a common food or meal **AND** food or meal is implicated as the source of illness by:

1. Epidemiologic evaluation (statistical evidence) OR
2. Laboratory evidence (identify agent in a food source) OR
3. Other compelling supportive information (i.e. field investigation, ill food workers, etc.)”

How does an individual report a suspected foodborne illness?

Any suspected cases of foodborne illness should be reported by the victim (or their family/friends/coworkers etc.) directly to Whitman County Public Health.

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| • N. 310 Main Street, Colfax (509) 397-6280 | Mon-Fri | 8:00am - 5:00pm |
| • SE 1205 Professional Mall Boulevard, Pullman (509) 332-6752 | Mon-Fri | 8:00am-12:00pm 1:00pm - 5:00pm |

If you have difficulty contacting the Health Department, contact the Washington State Department of Health’s Food Safety Program Staff at (360) 236-3330.

What does a food service establishment do if a foodborne illness is suspected?

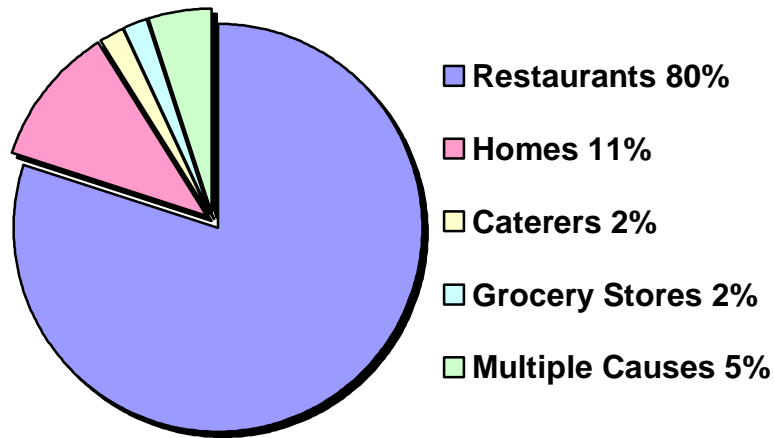
The Washington State Department of Health requires food service owner/operators to immediately contact Whitman County Public Health and report any complaints or incidence of a foodborne illness. **ALSO**, any food items that may be suspect are to be removed from sale and refrigerated until released by the health officer.

TOP 10 REASONS AN OUTBREAK MAY OCCUR IN YOUR ESTABLISHMENT

10. Inadequate Utensil Cleaning
9. Room Temperature Storage
8. Slow Cooling
7. $\frac{1}{2}$ Day or More Food Prep Time
6. Insufficient Heating/ Reheating
5. Insufficient Time/Temp on Hot Hold
4. Contaminated Raw Ingredients / Cross Contamination
3. Food Handled By Sick Worker
2. Improper Handwashing or Glove Use
1. Bare-Hand Contact



Washington State Foodborne Outbreaks Locations-2003



Nationwide, restaurants will provide more than **70 billion** meal and snack occasions in 2004.

Unfortunately, many people do not think about food safety until a food-related illness affects them or a family member. While the food supply in the United States is one of the safest in the world, CDC estimates that 76 million people get sick, more than 300,000 are hospitalized, and 5,000 Americans die each year from foodborne illness.

Preventing foodborne illness and death remains a major public health challenge.

What does Whitman County Public Health do if a foodborne illness is suspected?

When the health officer suspects that a food service establishment (or its employees) may be a source of a foodborne illness, the health officer shall take appropriate actions to control the transmission of the disease. Whitman County Public Health will work closely with Washington State Department of Health in all investigations of a foodborne illness. The actions can include any or all of the following.

- 1) Secure all records that may help identify individuals that may have been exposed, or require assistance in locating these individuals.
- 2) Secure the illness history of suspected employees.
- 3) Exclude any suspected employee(s) from working in a food service establishment until the health officer decides there is no further risk.
- 4) Suspend the permit of the food service establishment until the health officer decides there is no further risk.
- 5) Restrict the work activities of any sick employee.
- 6) Require medical and laboratory exams of any food service establishment's employees.
- 7) Obtain laboratory testing of any suspect foods.
- 8) Require the destruction of any suspect foods or prevent it from being served.
- 9) The health officer will prohibit food service workers with a communicable illness in a disease or carrier state from handling food if the infectious agent can be transmitted through food.
- 10) The provisions of chapter 246-100 WAC, communicable and certain other diseases shall apply.

For additional information, please contact Whitman County Public Health.

- N. 310 Main Street,
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**Whitman County Public Health
Division of Environmental Health**

