

What is *Staphylococcus aureus*?

Staphylococcus aureus is a bacterium which is commonly present in human nasal passage, throat, hair and skin without causing any discomfort. Staphylococci may be present in large numbers in inflamed lesions, and skin infections such as pimples and acne.



Staphylococcus aureus can be destroyed by normal cooking procedures, whereas the toxins produced are more resistant to heat; they may survive in food causing food poisoning.

Staphylococcal Food Poisoning

Staphylococcal food poisoning is caused by the heat-stable enterotoxins produced by *Staphylococcus aureus*.

Incubation Period: range from 30 minutes to 8 hours; usually 2-4 hours

Symptoms: nausea, vomiting, diarrhea, abdominal pain and sometimes fever

Mode of Transmission

Staphylococcus aureus can be passed from food handlers to foods. Foods that require considerable handling during preparation but without subsequent cooking and are stored at ambient temperature for a prolonged period of time may allow the toxin-producing Staphylococci multiply and elaborate toxins which cause illness.



Foods Involved

Food that are frequently incriminated in Staphylococcal food poisoning include:

- Meat, poultry and their products e.g. siu-mei and lo-mei
- Bakery e.g. cream-filled pastries
- Dessert
- Sashimi and sushi
- Sandwich
- Salad

Prevention

- Food handling time should be reduced to an absolute minimum. Proper handling, storage and thorough cooking of foods are required.
- Food contact surfaces of equipment and utensils should be maintained in a clean and sanitary condition.
- Keep perishable foods including leftovers at 4°C or below or above 60°C.
- Cool cooked food from 60°C to 20°C as quickly as possible (within 2 hours); and from 20°C to 4°C, within 4 hours or less.
 - Speed up the cooling process by using wide, shallow containers or reducing the size of the portions.



- As a general rule, after proper cooling where applicable, if perishable foods have been kept under room temperature:
 - for less than 2 hours, they can be refrigerated for final use later or used before the 4 hours limit is up.
 - for more than 2 hours but less than 4 hours, they should be used within the 4 hours limit is up but should not be returned to the refrigerator.
 - for more than 4 hours, they should be discarded.
- Always follow good personal hygiene practices, including:
 - Wash hands thoroughly with running water and soap for 20 seconds before and after handling foods, during food preparation, or after going to the toilet;
 - Wear clean and light-coloured outer clothing or protective overalls;
 - Refrain from smoking or eating during preparation. Open wounds should be covered by bright-coloured waterproof bandages or gloves;
 - Suspend from engaging in any food handling work when suffering or suspected to be suffering from an infectious disease or symptoms of illness such as diarrhea, vomiting, fever and abdominal pain.



Enquiry:

For further enquiries and information, please call
**Communication Resource Unit of Food and Environmental
 Hygiene Department at 2381 6096 or 24-hour hotline
 2868 0000.**

Staphylococcal

