

[IMAGE]

## Food Poisoning: A Bigger Issue Than GMO Crops?

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Other than the morbidity and mortality linked to eating too much food, "all-natural" organisms that contaminate our food cause more illness, more hospitalizations and more death than food contaminated by heavy metals, plastics, preservatives, artificial colors, emulsifiers, artificial sweeteners and pesticides combined. In fact, the numbers are staggering (see **Table 1**) and yet for some reason, food poisoning does not seem to resonate compared to more innocuous or esoteric threats.

For example, when I lecture on the topic, the possibility that GMO crops might cause widespread illness someday (they haven't yet) generates much more passion than the widespread illness caused every year by contaminated food. After reading quite a bit about it, I believe part of the problem is many people don't recognize food poisoning when they have it, since the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention estimates one of every six Americans contracts it every year. In other words, people know they're sick when symptoms such as an upset stomach, abdominal cramps, nausea, diarrhea and vomiting are present. The problem is they call it the stomach flu or the 24-hour flu – two ailments that technically don't exist (see below) – when in fact, they probably have food poisoning.

<b>Table 1: Estimated Annual Domestically Acquired Foodborne Illnesses, Hospitalizations And Deaths*</b>						
<b>Foodborne Agents</b>	<b>Estimated Annual Illnesses (90% credible interval)</b>		<b>Estimated Annual Hospitalizations (90% credible interval)</b>		<b>Estimated Annual Deaths (90% credible interval)</b>	
<b>31 known pathogens</b>	9.4 million (6.6-12.7 million)	20%	55,961 (39,534-75,741)	44%	1,351 (712-2,268)	44%
<b>Unspecified agents</b>	38.4 million (19.8-61.2 million)	80%	71,878 (9,924-157,340)	56%	1,686 (369-3,338)	56%
<b>Total</b>	47.8 million (28.7-71.1 million)	100%	127,839 (62,529-215,562)	100%	3,037 (1,492-4,983)	100%
<i>*2011; attributed to 31 pathogens and unspecified agents transmitted through food, United States.<sup>7</sup></i>						

### **The Stomach Flu / 24-Hour Flu Is Not the Flu**

The influenza virus family causes the flu, which is a contagious disease that affects the upper respiratory system. What is referred to as the stomach flu or the 24-hour flu is not the flu, nor is it caused by the influenza virus. It is gastroenteritis (irritation of the GI tract that causes abdominal pain, nausea, vomiting and diarrhea). See **Tables 2 and 3** for the causes.

<b>Table 2: Top 6 Sources Of Food Poisoning Illness In America<sup>7</sup></b>	
<b>Pathogen</b>	<b>Estimated Annual Illnesses</b>
<b>Norovirus</b>	5,461,731
<b>Salmonella</b>	1,027,561
<b>Clostridium perfringens</b>	965,958
<b>Campylobacter spp.</b>	845,024
<b>Staphylococcus aureus</b>	241,148
<b>E. coli O157</b>	73,480

Table 3: Top 6 Sources Of Food Poisoning Fatalities Per Year In America <sup>7</sup>	
Pathogen	Estimated Annual Deaths
Salmonella	378
Toxoplasma gondii	327
Listeria monocytogenes	255
Norovirus	49
Campylobacter	76
E. coli O157	61

### Stats & Facts About Food Poisoning

- More than 200 known diseases are transmitted through food.<sup>1</sup>
- Norovirus is the leading cause of illness and outbreaks from contaminated food in the United States.<sup>2</sup>
- Salmonella is the second leading cause of food poisoning. There are almost 7,000 serotyped Salmonella isolates.<sup>3</sup>
- Long-term effects from food poisoning include kidney disease from E. coli and possible arthritis from Salmonella, among others.<sup>4</sup>
- Campylobacter infection causes more than a third of Guillain-Barré Syndrome cases.<sup>4</sup>
- Most people don't realize they have food poisoning because most do not get sick enough to have the laboratory tests required to confirm an organism caused their illness. For example, for every one case of Salmonella illness confirmed in the laboratory, there are approximately 30 cases of Salmonella illness that were not confirmed.<sup>5</sup>

### Other Misconceptions

An Arizona Department of Health Services epidemiologist shed light on why food poisoning is so tricky to diagnose:<sup>6</sup>

- Most of the time, the last thing you ate isn't what made you sick.
- Many foodborne diseases don't produce the toxins until after they are in your intestines, and once the process begins, it can take days to weeks for levels to increase enough to cause problems.
- The same pathogen can affect different people differently.
- Sometimes only one person gets sick after eating a shared meal that was contaminated.
- A person's current immune status and stress level play a role in who can stop a bug and who cannot.

- Good fortune can dictate who misses a pocket of high infestation when sharing a common source such as an appetizer.

## References

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