

# Beliefs that Restaurant Meals Made People Sick

## EHS-Net Study Findings and Recommendations

Foodborne illnesses are common, but many people do not know much about them. People need to know more so they can be protected from foodborne illness. But first, we need to know what people know and believe about foodborne illness.

Foodborne illness often causes vomiting and diarrhea. Restaurants are one source of foodborne illness. This study looked at people who believed their vomiting and diarrhea were caused by food they ate at restaurants.

### What the Study Described

This study described people's experience with and beliefs about foodborne illness.

### What the Study Found

Those with a milder sickness (diarrhea but not vomiting; did not miss work) were more likely to believe their illness was caused by a meal in a restaurant. This suggests that people think foodborne illness is a minor sickness they get from eating food in a restaurant.

54% of people who believed a restaurant meal caused their illness said their illness began within 5 hours of eating the meal. Those who gave timing as the reason for their belief were more likely to say they got sick sooner after the meal. These findings suggest that people may believe that foodborne illness symptoms occur shortly after eating the food. This is not true for many common foodborne illnesses.

Many people do not know how long it takes for sickness from food to happen. This means they likely do not know which meals caused their illness.

Younger people and people who ate out recently were more likely to think their illness was caused by a meal in a restaurant. This may be because they were more likely to have eaten a restaurant meal around the time of their illness.

Most (92%) people do not tell restaurants or health departments about sickness they think might be from food eaten in a restaurant.

People see foodborne illness as a minor sickness that can come from eating food in a restaurant. They think symptoms of foodborne illness occur soon after eating the food. This is not true for many common foodborne illnesses.

Most people do not tell health departments about sickness they think came from food eaten at a restaurant. Health departments use this information for investigations.



This study was conducted by the Environmental Health Specialists Network (EHS-Net). EHS-Net is a federally funded collaboration of federal, state, and local environmental health specialists and epidemiologists working to better understand the environmental causes of foodborne and waterborne illness. Visit EHS-Net at <http://www.cdc.gov/nceh/ehs/EHSNet>.

## EHS-Net Recommends

Public health programs should teach the public about

- Foodborne illnesses and how soon they can make people sick. People will then be better able to find out what might have made them sick.
- How important it is to report when you think you have a foodborne illness. It is vital to report suspected illnesses when more than one person gets sick from eating the same meal. The restaurant or health department needs to know so they can find, study, and stop foodborne illness outbreaks.

