



**If you have food poisoning or
an infectious disease**

**How your doctor and
environmental health work together**

Doctors and Environmental Health staff work together when investigating food poisoning or infectious diseases. These can be an isolated case, several cases within a family, group or an outbreak affecting people within the community.

The Health Protection Agency (Public Health England) has the overseeing role on risks in the community and is accountable to central government.

The Role of your doctor.

Your doctor has the responsibility for diagnosis and treatment and may offer advice to prevent further spread.

Your doctor will encourage the infected person to provide a stool sample so that the organism can be identified. A definite diagnosis cannot be made without a confirmed specimen result from a microbiology laboratory.

When your doctor knows or suspects that a patient is suffering from an infectious disease, it is required to report without delay to the local health organisation where the person lives, unless the doctor has reason to believe that another doctor has already done so.

Inevitably a fair amount of time may have elapsed since the infection was acquired as most people only consult a doctor about gastrointestinal illness if the symptoms are unusually severe or persist for a long time.

Your doctor is the first person able to prevent spread of an infectious disease by giving appropriate advice to anyone with diarrhoea or vomiting.

Persons suffering from food poisoning or infectious disease must inform their employers immediately if they are in one of the 'high risk' groups. That is anyone:-

- preparing food e.g. in restaurants, pubs, residential care homes
- working with the young or elderly e.g. in a nursery or a nursing home
- working as a carer e.g. in a residential care or nursing home
- working in the medical profession e.g. a Doctor or nurse
- under 5 years of age attending nurseries or similar groups
- who is unable to maintain a good standard of personal hygiene

People in 'high risk' groups must not work or attend school or nursery while they have symptoms. If a doctor suspects the case is continuing to work or attend they should contact the local Environmental Health service to take exclusion action, and the Health Protection Agency.

Most infected people may return to work or school when their bowel habits return to normal for at least 48 hours after symptoms have passed and provided that they carefully wash their hands after toilet visits.

The Role of the Environmental Health Officer (EHO)

The role of Environmental Health is to investigate the cause of the infection and to take action to deal with them to prevent further spread.

Environmental Health staff are fully trained in this area of work and work under the direction of the Health Protection Agency.

When the microbiology laboratory identifies an infectious organism they inform your doctor and the local authority Environmental Health service. Environmental Health staff may ask your doctor for contact details for the infected person.

Environmental Health staff will immediately attempt to contact the infected person either in person, telephone or by post to take a history of food and drink consumed, places visited before the illness began, and to provide advice on preventing further spread of the infection.

If the person infected with food poisoning is a Food Handler they pose a greater risk of spreading the disease further and it is the Environmental Health staffs aim to minimise this, similarly if the infected person has contracted the disease by coming into contact with an infected person or having consumed food which has been contaminated this also needs to be ascertained.

In order to find out the possible cause and to enable Environmental Health staff to act effectively, a questionnaire is sent to the person infected to try and find out what food has been consumed and where it was eaten or purchased.

Environmental Health staff will provide the infected person with advice and guidance regarding exclusion from work or school, return to work or school and may take enforcement action under public health legislation if the infected person and/or employer/school do not take the necessary action.

Diseases that are notifiable:

Cholera	Smallpox
Plague	Typhus Relapsing Fever and Food Poisoning
Acute encephalitis	Acute poliomyelitis
Anthrax	Diphtheria
Dysentery	Leprosy
Leptospirosis	Malaria
Measles	Meningitis (bacterial or viral)
Meningococcal septicaemia (without meningitis)	
Mumps	Ophthalmia neonatorum
Paratyphoid fever	Tetanus
Tuberculosis	Typhoid fever
Viral haemorrhagic fever (includes Lassa fever, Marburg disease and several others)	
Viral hepatitis	Whooping cough
Yellow fever	Psittacosis.

Further advice is available by contacting your Doctor or from:

Fenland District Council
Environmental Health
Fenland Hall
County Road
March
Cambs
PE15 8NQ

Tel: 01354 654321

Fax: 01354 606911

Email: envhealth@fenland.gov.uk