

## NEWS

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## contents:

Foodborne Outbreaks in Texas, 1983-1986  
Understanding the Food Poisoners  
CPSC: Baby Walker Recall

TEXAS STATE DOCUMENTS  
COLLECTION

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## Foodborne Outbreaks in Texas, 1983-1986

Since January 1, 1983, 35 foodborne outbreaks in Texas have been reported to the Bureau of Epidemiology. *Shigella sonnei* (6) or *S. flexneri* (1) was implicated in seven outbreaks. Norwalk virus and *Salmonella* organisms were implicated in six and three outbreaks, respectively.

All seven foodborne shigellosis outbreaks were associated with food items prepared or served at restaurants or cafeterias. The largest foodborne shigellosis outbreak occurred in August and September 1986 in the cities of Midland and Odessa. Over 300 culture-confirmed cases were identified. Consumption of lettuce from a single commercial distributor was identified as the source.

The largest foodborne outbreak occurred in September 1983. Over 500 individuals experienced a febrile illness with a sore throat following attendance at a wedding anniversary party. This outbreak was attributed to group A,  $\beta$ -hemolytic *Streptococcus*. Consumption of potato salad served at the party was associated with illness.

Twenty of the 35 outbreaks were associated with food items prepared and eaten at cafeterias or restaurants. Food items prepared at private homes or by caterers and served at social functions were implicated as the source of illness in eight outbreaks.

Norwalk virus was the suspected etiologic agent in five of the outbreaks associated with food items prepared at private homes or by caterers. Potato salad was the implicated food item in three of the eight outbreaks. Beans, guacamole, or chili con queso and mashed potatoes or tea were the implicated food items in two outbreaks, respectively. The source was unknown for three outbreaks.

**PDN Editorial Note:** Several food preparation practices contribute to foodborne diseases. These include: poor personal hygiene by food handlers, improper holding temperature, inadequate cooking, and food from an unsafe source. In most foodborne disease outbreaks caused by bacterial pathogens, the food had been stored at improper holding temperatures. Poor personal hygiene practices on the part of the food handler are usually the cause of foodborne disease outbreaks caused by viral pathogens.

The US Department of Agriculture, Food Safety and Inspection Service, has prepared a new publication, "Safe Food to Go," which provides information on how to safely care for foods that will be served away from home. This 20-page, colorfully illustrated brochure includes practical food safety information for almost every outside eating occasion, as well as information about foodborne organisms that can cause illness.

Bulk copies of "Safe Food to Go" are available by writing or calling: USDA/FSIS Public Awareness Branch, Washington, DC 20250; (202) 447-9351

Physicians and health care providers are reminded to report foodborne illnesses attributable to reportable diseases and any unusual or group expression of illness to the Texas Department of Health in Austin, through their local health authorities, or to the State Epidemiologist by the most expeditious means.

\* This report was prepared by Jeffery P. Taylor, MPH, Staff Epidemiologist, Bureau of Epidemiology, Texas Department of Health.

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## UNDERSTANDING THE

**What is Food Poisoning?** Food poisoning, caused by harmful bacteria, normally produces intestinal flu-like symptoms lasting a few hours to several days. But in cases of botulism, or when food poisoning strikes infants, the ill, or the elderly, the situation can be serious.

Bacteria	How It Attacks
<i>Staphylococcus aureus (Staph)</i>	Staph spreads from someone handling food. It is found on the skin and in boils, pimples, and throat infections. At warm temperatures, staph produces a poison.
<i>Salmonella</i>	You can get salmonella when infected food — meat, poultry, eggs, fish — is eaten raw or undercooked. Other cases? When cooked food comes in contact with infected raw food, or when an infected person contaminates food.
<i>Clostridium perfringens</i>	This "buffet germ" grows rapidly in large portions of food that are cooling slowly. It can also grow in chafing dishes which may not keep food sufficiently hot, and even in the refrigerator if food is stored in large portions which do not cool quickly.
<i>Campylobacter jejuni</i>	You drink untreated water on an outing. Your pet becomes infected and spreads it to the whole family, or you eat raw or undercooked meat, poultry, or shellfish.
<i>Clostridium botulinum</i>	May occur in home-canned or any canned goods that have not received adequate heat processing. Swollen or severely dented cans, off-odor, or spurting liquid when opened are warning signs. Fruits, jams and jellies, and food high in acid are not included.

\*Adapted from: US Department of Agriculture. Safe food to go -- a guide to packing lunches, picnicing and camping out. Home and Garden Bulletin, No. 242, May 1986.

## FOOD POISONERS\*

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### Where do these bacteria come from and how can they be stopped?

Food poisoning bacteria, microscopic in size, surround us—in the air, soil, water, in our own digestive tracts, and in those of many animals. The only way they can effectively be stopped is by careful attention to food-handling rules like those outlined in this booklet.\*

Symptoms	Prevention
2-8 hours after eating, you could have vomiting and diarrhea lasting a day or two.	Cooking won't destroy the staph poison, so: -Wash hands, utensils before preparing food. -Don't leave food out over 2 hours. -Susceptible foods are meat, poultry, meat and poultry salads, cheese, egg products, starchy salads (potato, macaroni, pasta, and tuna), custards, cream-filled desserts.
In 12-36 hours you could have diarrhea, fever, and vomiting lasting 2-7 days.	Keep raw food away from cooked food, and: -Thoroughly cook meat, poultry, fish. -Be especially careful with poultry, pork, roast beef, hamburger. -Don't drink unpasteurized milk.
In 8-24 hours you could have diarrhea and gas pains, ending usually in less than a day. But older people and ulcer patients can be badly affected.	Keep food hot (over 140°F) or cold (under 40°F), and: -Divide bulk cooked foods into smaller portions for serving and cooling. -Be careful with poultry, gravy, stews, casseroles.
In 2-5 days you could have severe (possibly bloody) diarrhea, cramping, fever and headache lasting 2-7 days.	Don't drink untreated water or unpasteurized milk, and: -Thoroughly clean hands, utensils, and surfaces that touch raw meats. -Thoroughly cook meat, poultry and fish.
In 12-48 hours your nervous system could be affected. Symptoms? Double vision, droopy eyelids, trouble speaking and swallowing, difficult breathing. Untreated, botulism can be fatal.	Carefully examine home-canned goods before use, and: -Don't use any canned goods showing danger signs. -Don't use non-acid home-canned goods that have not been properly processed in a pressure cooker. -If you or a family member has botulism symptoms, get medical help immediately. -Refrigerate suspect food and call health authorities.

## CPSC: BABY WALKER RECALL

In cooperation with the US Consumer Product Safety Commission (CPSC), the Service Merchandise Company of Nashville, Tennessee, has announced a voluntary recall of 49,000 Hi-Back "Kiddie Kare" infant walkers, model 106 FLP, which were purchased in Service Merchandise stores in 1984 and 1985.

The models involved have a white vinyl binding tape on the edges of the crotch strap. The hazard involves slippage of the strap through the buckle which secures the front of the walker's seat to its deck. This slippage could result in infant entrapment or injury. The CPSC and Service Merchandise Company are aware of at least five incidents involving seat strap slippage, one of which was associated with an infant death.

Service merchandise is offering a free replacement seat at no charge to the consumer and urges all owners of the model 106 FLP walker to participate in the recall. The model number is located on the identification tag on the seat.

To obtain a free replacement seat, call toll-free 1-800-251-1389 or write to: Service Merchandise Company, PO Box 24600, Nashville, Tennessee 37202 and request a replacement for the walker. Additional information may also be obtained by calling the CPSC toll-free hotline number, 1-800-638-CPSC. A teletypewriter number for the hearing impaired is 1-800-638-8270.

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