

**Article:** Eating in Restaurants: A Risk for Foodborne Disease?

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Foodborne illnesses are a growing concern in the United States. The public seems more aware of outbreaks of *E.coli* O157, *Salmonella* and *Listeria*. The investigators of this study reviewed outbreak and sporadic (non-outbreak) foodborne illness data to determine if there is an association between eating in restaurants and becoming ill with a foodborne disease. Findings indicate eating in a restaurant increases chances of getting a foodborne illness.

Data reviewed for this study included outbreak data from the national Foodborne Outbreak Surveillance System and the Foodborne Disease Active Surveillance Network (FoodNet).

FoodNet is a partnership between CDC, selected state health departments, the US Department of Agriculture Food Safety Inspection Service and the US Food and Drug Administration.

Investigators reviewed data from a large population-based telephone survey, and case-control studies conducted on sporadic illness including *E.coli* O157, *Salmonella* and *Campylobacter* infections. In every reviewed FoodNet study, the findings were consistent: eating in a restaurant increases the risk of acquiring a foodborne illness.

Since restaurants served over 70 billion meals in the United States in 2005, the restaurant industry, consumers and health care professionals need to take steps to minimize the impact of restaurant-associated foodborne illness. From the restaurant industry's perspective, ordering foods from suppliers who have a good record of delivering high quality foods, training managers and food handlers in good hygiene and food sanitation practices by restricting ill workers and developing effective sick leave policies, and following strict food handling policies are a few recommendations. Consumers should avoid known high risk foods including undercooked eggs

and undercooked ground beef in any venue, home or restaurant, to reduce the chance of disease. Health care professionals should ensure appropriate reporting of suspected cases of foodborne illness and assist public health authorities in the epidemiological investigations of disease.

Although most restaurant settings provide safe food for their customers, the number of people who suffer from foodborne illnesses remains too high. The food service industry, the consumer and the health care community must work together to attain the ultimate goal of a healthier consumer.