

## Report a Food or Water Borne Illness

- Did you think you got sick from something you ate or drank?
- Did you attend an event where people became ill?
- If you think something you ate or drank is making you or someone you know feel sick, contact your doctor and then fill out this My Meal Detective form as completely as possible. The Virginia Department of Health will evaluate your complaint and request follow-up by your Local Health Department, if necessary.
- The BRDH Environmental Health Team works closely with our Epidemiology department as well as the State-wide Virginia Rapid Response Team when there is a regional or statewide foodborne illness outbreak to quickly investigate and mitigate the spread of foodborne illness.
- **Only one My Meal Detective form should be completed per person who is ill.**



### What information do I need to provide?

Your local health department will need basic information to begin the investigation. As with any detective work, information that answers the **who, what, when, where,** and **how** questions will be important when investigating the culprit of your illness and to determine whether or not a foodborne outbreak has occurred. The more information we get, the faster we can solve your case! Keep these questions in mind when you report your suspected foodborne illness:

- How many people are sick?
- What are the symptoms of illness?

- How long did it take from the time you ate or drank the item until your symptoms began?
- How long did the symptoms last?
- Are people still becoming sick?
- What did the ill people eat?
- How many people were potentially exposed?

Additionally, when an outbreak is first suspected, the agent that caused people to become sick is likely unknown. The identification of that agent, typically a microorganisms, by laboratory testing is a critical piece of the puzzle that will help focus the investigation. If you are ill with symptoms that you believe may be associated with an outbreak, it is recommended you see your doctor so that samples (like a stool specimen) can be collected for laboratory testing; alternatively, your health department may request to collect specimens from you. To learn more about foodborne disease causing germs, please browse our [foodborne disease data page](#), which provides a list of fact sheets on many foodborne illness germs.

## **A note on the “last meal bias”**

People often associate their illness with the last item that they consumed. While there are a few food or waterborne illnesses that develop quickly after consumption, most of these illnesses can take up to 72 hours (3 days) or longer to develop. When thinking about what might have caused you to become ill, it is helpful to review the foods and drinks that you have consumed over the last several days.

## **It's Important to Report Food Borne Illness**

- When two or more people get the same illness from the same contaminated food or drink, the event is called a food or water borne outbreak.
- Reporting illnesses as soon as possible helps us identify potential outbreaks of foodborne disease.
- Public health officials investigate outbreaks to control them, so more people do not get sick in the outbreak and to better understand how to prevent similar outbreaks from happening in the future
- To learn more how to prevent similar outbreaks from happening in the future and about foodborne illness, visit:

- [Food Safety.gov](https://www.foodsafety.gov)
- [Center for Disease Control and Prevention-Food Safety](https://www.cdc.gov/foodsafety/)