

Foods Most Likely to Give You Food Poisoning

- Reviewed By: [Kathleen Zelman, MPH, RD, LD](#)

Sprouts



They're seeds that have sprouted. Raw and lightly cooked sprouts, especially clover and alfalfa, have caused multistate outbreaks of food poisoning every year since 2006. The same warm, humid conditions that nurture sprouts also promote *Salmonella*, *Listeria*, and *E. coli*. You might be tempted to toss these antioxidant-packed

seedlings fresh into salads and sandwiches; however, it's safer to cook the sprouts first. Washing the sprout will not destroy the toxic bacterial contaminants.

Raw Milk



It's one of the most dangerous sources of foodborne illness and is illegal in some states. It's milk from animals that hasn't been heated, or pasteurized, to kill bacteria. Raw milk can harbor *E. coli*, Listeria, Campylobacter, and Salmonella. These bacteria can cause diarrhea for days, vomiting, and serious illnesses like Guillain-Barré syndrome that can lead to paralysis. Check your milk container to ensure it's pasteurized, especially milk purchased at farmers' markets.

Eggs



Annually, *Salmonella*-tainted eggs cause 79,000 U.S. cases of food poisoning and 30 deaths. Chickens can pass *Salmonella* to eggs before the shell forms. Bacteria can also infect eggs through poultry feces. Refrigerate eggs at or below 40° F. Some products and recipes call for uncooked eggs. Use pasteurized eggs (they're hard to find) or you can pasteurize the eggs yourself by dunking eggs in 140° F water using *sous vide* for at least 3½ minutes. The eggs, however, may thicken slightly.

Flour



It's rare, but raw flour can be contaminated with *E. coli* during harvesting, grinding, and sifting. Bleaching flour won't kill *E. coli*, which can cause bloody diarrhea, vomiting, and even kidney failure and death. Boxed cake mixes and prepared cookie dough also can harbor germs.

Bagged Lettuce



Fresh salads are another top source of food poisoning. But pinpointing the cause can be tricky. Some outbreaks are tied to a specific kind of greens, often romaine lettuce and spinach, or to certain growers or packers. Salmonella and other bacteria can be traced to dirty irrigation water, soil, or human hands. Germs multiply in the juice from cut leaves and can get trapped inside the bags. They can cling to the leaves even after washing.

Chicken



Chicken is America's No. 1 choice of meat. Every year, about a million people in the U.S. get sick after eating chicken. Like all animals, chickens have bacteria in their gut. Pathogens such as *Campylobacter* and *Salmonella* can get on the birds during processing and packaging, and go all the way to your cutting board and utensils. *Don't wash* raw chicken because it can contaminate your kitchen. Cooking the chicken to the proper temperature will kill toxic bacteria.

Pre-cut Melon



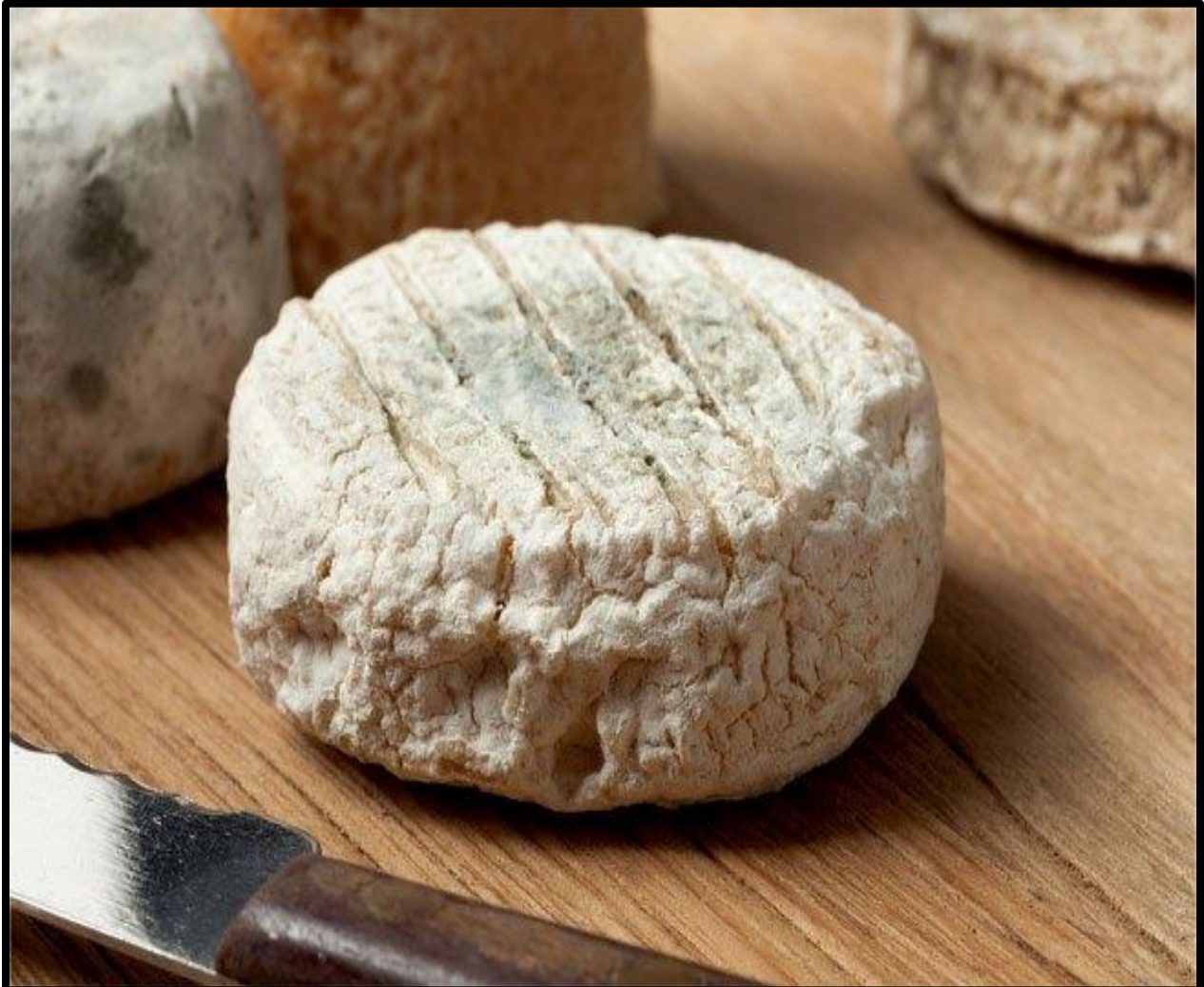
Every year, 1.35 million people in the U.S. get Salmonella food poisoning. Nearly 27,000 are hospitalized. Infections are more common in the summer, when more of us enjoy watermelon, cantaloupe, and honeydew melon. The vines grow on the ground, where the rinds can pick up germs. Their surface can be hard to sanitize. Pre-cut melon can pass on Norovirus, Listeria, and other harmful agents. Whole melons that are thoroughly washed are best. Make sure you refrigerate pre-cut fruits or pack them in ice.

Oysters



Eating fresh oysters right out of the shell can be present a health hazard. These mollusks draw food from coastal waters through their gills. They trap viruses and bacteria the same way. Eating tainted raw oysters can give you Vibriosis, which causes diarrhea, vomiting, fever, and chills in more than 80,000 Americans every year. You also can catch Norovirus, sometimes called "stomach flu." The only safe way to enjoy oysters is to cook them. Raw oysters can be especially dangerous to those with advanced liver disease.

Raw Milk Cheeses



Eating soft cheeses made with raw milk is much riskier than pasteurized cheeses. You're 160 times more likely to pick up *Listeria* when eating Brie, Camembert, and blue-veined varieties such as Roquefort. *Listeria* can spread beyond your gut and cause headaches, loss of balance, and convulsions. It also may lead to miscarriage, stillbirth, or premature delivery.

Ground Beef



***E. coli* became a household name in the early 1990s, when more than 700 adults and kids fell ill from undercooked hamburger patties sold by a fast-food chain. Four people died. *E. coli* remains a major culprit behind food poisoning outbreaks. The bacteria is inside humans and animals naturally. Cook steaks and roasts to 145° F on the inside. Ground beef and pork need to reach 160° F to be safe. Eating rare, red, or raw ground beef or pork is fraught with danger!**

Hot Dogs



These ballpark staples are precooked. Americans eat a whopping 20 billion of them each year. They, however, can pick up Listeria after they've been packaged. To avoid illness, hot dogs should be just that: hot. Always reheat them before eating them.

Invisible Threat



You can come down with food poisoning from 20 minutes to 6 days after eating a contaminated your meal. The last thing you ate isn't always what made you sick To avoid foodborne illness, take it seriously. It sends 128,000 people to the hospital every year. Wash hands and surfaces often, separate foods to avoid cross-contamination, and keep hot food hot and cold food cold. You can't see or smell germs and viruses the same way you see or smell spoiled food.