1. What is *Bacillus cereus* food intoxication?

Well recognized as a cause of “food poisoning” or “foodborne disease”, *Bacillus cereus* (bah-CILL-us SEER-ee-us) is a toxin-producing bacterium that can cause illness when ingested.

2. What are the symptoms?

The toxins can cause:

- stomach cramps and diarrhea; and
- nausea and vomiting.

Vomiting symptoms often begin 1 to 6 hours after swallowing the bacteria, while diarrheal illness takes 6 to 24 hours to begin. The illness often lasts less than one day.

3. How do I know if I have this illness?

If you have the above symptoms, you should see your family doctor, who can arrange to have your stool sample tested. If you think food may have made you sick, call one of the offices listed below.

4. How does it spread?

The bacteria that causes this illness can be found in soil and in raw, dried processed foods, such as rice, noodles, and cereal. People can become ill by eating food in which the bacteria has survived and multiplied, like cooked foods left at room temperature for several hours.

5. How is it treated?

Most people who become sick due to *Bacillus cereus* will get better on their own. People with diarrhea and vomiting must drink plenty of fluids to prevent dehydration. Antibiotics cannot be used to treat this illness.

6. How can I keep from getting this illness?

This bacterium can survive boiling, and multiplies quickly at room temperature, therefore you must handle all foods carefully:

- Keep hot foods hot, to at least 60°C (140°F).
- Chill foods promptly to 4°C (40°F) to prevent the growth of bacteria.
- Reheat foods to at least 74°C (165°F) before eating.

See the reverse side of this sheet for more food safety tips.

7. How soon can I return to work after being sick?

Usually, you can return to work as soon as you feel well, but certain jobs are more likely to allow the spread of bacteria from workers to clients. For this reason, food handlers, health care workers, and child care providers must stay off work until they are cleared by the Medical Officer of Health.

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**FIGHT BAC!**

Keep Food Safe From Bacteria

For more information contact the nearest Government Service Centre or Regional Health and Community Services Board Office. November 2004
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