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HOUSEKEEPERS' CHAT

Monday, March 22, 1937
U.S. Department of Agriculture

(FOR BROADCAST USE ONLY)

Subject: "FOOD POISONING -- HOW TO PREVENT IT." Facts from the Federal Food and Drug Administration, U. S. Department of Agriculture, Washington, D.C.

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Friends, our Washington correspondent has been on the sick list. Laid low, she says, by villainous bacteria hiding in an innocent-looking dessert.

"It was a Saturday afternoon," she writes, "and I had waited a long time for lunch. I met a friend at a certain tea room, and we ordered a hearty meal -- meat pastries with mushroom sauce, and for dessert an apricot whip with a custard sauce.

"We ate our lunch, and then we went home, each to our separate dwelling place. The minute I got inside the door," continues our correspondent, "I was beset by all the symptoms of food poisoning I have so often described, in reporting other peoples' food poisoning. Cramps, nausea, vomiting. But I shall not suffer you to hear all the painful details. As soon as I could I called a doctor, he administered a hypodermic and left some medicine, and in a few days I was able to report for work again. It was terrible while it lasted," says our friend. "Of course, ordinary food poisoning is hardly ever fatal -- but don't let that fact keep you from avoiding food that may be the least bit contaminated. Don't let anybody tell you that food poisoning is a simple ailment -- it's worse than intestinal flu and seasickness combined.

"To continue with the story -- the friend who ate lunch with me was also very ill, and so were others who ate in the same place on the same day. We were informed that the one food eaten by everybody who was ill, was the dessert -- apricot whip and custard sauce. So the finger of suspicion points to some ingredient in the whip or the sauce -- perhaps the eggs or the cream.

"Now the tea-room in which we ate lunch on that unfortunate day has a reputation for good food, and there was nothing about the taste or the smell of the apricot whip to show that it was contaminated. So we must conclude that the food poisoning outbreak was purely an accident, such as may occur any time in the best regulated kitchens. The best regulated? Well, perhaps not the best. For the best tea-room managers and homemakers know how to protect foods, especially custard mixtures, so that there will be no danger of food poisoning.

"Every year the Federal Food and Drug Administration is called on to investigate a large number of food-poisoning outbreaks -- last year the number was sixty-nine. The products suspected included meat, fish, shell-

fish, fruits, vegetables, dairy products, pastries, soups, and condiments. In some instances, where as many as one hundred persons were stricken, illness was caused by contaminated cream-filled pastries, offering further evidence of the danger of such products, unless they are prepared under strictly sanitary conditions, and are stored and handled properly. As Mr. Campbell pointed out in his annual report, the recurring danger from eclairs, cream puffs, and cream-filled cakes has resulted, in several States, in strict regulations governing the manufacture and sale of such pastries.

"Now these strict regulations are an excellent safeguard for public health," says our correspondent, "but neither State regulations nor Federal regulations can prevent outbreaks of food poisoning in public tea rooms or in private homes, if those in charge of cooking and serving food do not know the fundamental rules of taking care of food. If each person preparing food for the table would remember that sound food, freshly and thoroughly cooked, does not cause food poisoning, outbreaks of such illness would cease."

Now, what are the fundamental rules of taking care of food? Instead of listing them in detail, our official reporter with the Federal Food and Drug Administration calls attention to a bulletin prepared by the food specialists in the Bureau of Home Economics. The name of this bulletin is "Care of Food in the Home." Among the subjects discussed are causes of food spoilage, storage of food, containers, special means of keeping foods cold, the care of different kinds of food, such as milk and other dairy products, fresh meat, fish, and poultry, eggs, left-over cooked foods. . . .

"Let's pause here a moment," suggests our Washington reporter, "for this paragraph on left-over cooked food has a new meaning to me now: 'Moist cooked foods, such as milk, eggs, meat, or fish, are excellent breeding places for harmful micro-organisms, including those that cause serious poisoning without making the food smell or taste spoiled. Left-overs of meat pies, dishes made with cream sauce, gravies, custards, boiled or cream salad dressing must be carefully handled and should be used promptly. In general, left-over foods should be transferred promptly from the dishes in which they were served to separate, clean, dry, covered dishes, chilled as quickly as possible, and kept in the cold storeroom or the refrigerator.

"In hot weather, especially, left-overs of perishable foods should be boiled or thoroughly heated before they are served again. 'Warming up' such foods is not enough; it may even increase the danger by raising the temperature to a point favorable to the growth of micro-organisms but not high enough to destroy them.'

"So much for left-over cooked foods. Other subjects discussed in the bulletin are care of fresh fruits and vegetables, cooking fats and table oils, baked goods, dry foodstuffs, and canned goods. The authors conclude with a list of general rules for preventing food spoilage in the home.

"Remember that the bacteria which infect food are found everywhere. Give them a favorable temperature, and the necessary moisture, and they multiply rapidly. They seem to be especially partial to meat, fish, and cream fillings for cakes and pies, and -- as I found out to my sorrow -- apricot whips with custard sauce."

So concludes today's report from the Federal Food and Drug Administration. If you want a copy of the Farmers' Bulletin mentioned, "Care of Food in the Home," write to the United States Department of Agriculture, Washington, D. C.

