USAPHC
U.S. ARMY PUBLIC HEALTH COMMAND

Information for Making Safer Local Food Choices During Deployment

A Communication Toolkit for Leaders

Make sure your personnel have the information they need to make smart local food choices.

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Eat SMART, Stay Ready!

Information for Making Safer Local Food Choices During Deployment

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THE RISK TO YOUR UNIT

There are numerous threats to the health and safety of U.S. military members during deployment, particularly in areas with significant disease threats and minimal public health infrastructure. Prevention of illness is key to ensuring military operational readiness. Gastrointestinal illness, such as diarrhea, commonly afflicts deployed U.S. military personnel and can adversely affect operational readiness[1,2,3,4]. Consumption of local, unapproved food sources is a risk behavior for contracting diarrheal illness[4]. Local foods are those eaten on the economy and/or from sources not approved by U.S. military preventive medicine and veterinary personnel. They are found off-Forward Operating Base (FOB) and also on-FOB in host country owned and operated food establishments. Do not assume local foods eaten on-FOB are from approved sources.

Commanders and leaders must ensure their personnel make informed choices. Part of taking care of Service members is to provide them with the information necessary to make smart food choices in theater.

This toolkit provides unit leaders with resources, materials and suggestions for educating personnel about the risks of eating local foods during deployment and how to mitigate those risks.

HOW TO USE THIS TOOLKIT

This toolkit contains support materials and resources including: messages and talking points, frequently asked questions and answers, and other health information materials. The following list provides leaders with information about each communication product and suggestions for its use.

- **Messages and talking points.** This resource contains information about the health risks that may result from the consumption of local foods and information about making safer food choices. Leaders should familiarize themselves with these messages and talking points and deliver them during personnel education, formal training sessions with Service members, pre-mission briefs, or casual conversations where questions regarding counterinsurgency (COIN) operations, food safety, gastrointestinal illness, etc. arise.

- **Frequently asked questions and answers.** This resource is intended for unit leaders to use when addressing personnel questions and concerns regarding local food consumption and safer local food choices. It can also be printed, posted and distributed to Service members as an informational handout during downtime or training sessions.

- **Briefing: Making Safer Local Food Choices During Deployment.** This briefing contains information about potential health risks from the consumption of local foods and about food choices. Leaders can present this briefing to Service members and/or print and distribute to Service members as a handout.

- **Deployment Food Risk Smart Card: Leader's Tips for Eating Local.** This card contains information about potential health risks from the consumption of local foods and information about food choices. Leaders should use this card as a quick reference while deployed.

- **Deployment Food Risk Smart Card: Tips for Eating Local.** This Smart Card contains information about health risks that may result from the consumption of local foods and information about food choices. It can be used as a quick reference for deployed personnel. Leaders should provide each Service member in their units with a copy of this card, preferably during a training session or brief meeting where the messages and talking points are discussed.

- **Smart Food Choices Poster.** This poster is intended for Service members and provides information about food choices. This poster can be displayed in locations such as common living areas, barracks, restroom facilities, and health clinics.

- **Smart Food Choices Sticker.** This sticker is intended for Service members and provides information about food choices. This sticker can be displayed in restroom facilities (on the interior walls of latrines or bathroom stall doors, bathroom mirrors, doorways to the restroom facilities, etc.) on the installation. Prior to posting the stickers, please ensure that no surfaces will be damaged by their removal.

- **Smart Food Choices eCard.** This electronic card is intended for Service members and provides information about food choices. Leaders can send this card via e-mail, preferably mid-deployment, to their personnel as a reminder to make smart food choices.

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

For additional information and resources on food safety, contact the U.S. Army Institute of Public Health (AIPH) Water Supply Management Program: http://phc.amedd.army.mil/organization/institute/dehe/Pages/wsmp.aspx or the AIPH Food Protection Program: http://phc.amedd.army.mil/ORGANIZATION/INSTITUTE/DVET/Pages/FoodProtection.aspx, or visit the U.S. Army Public Health Command Health Information Products eCatalog at https://usaphcapps.amedd.army.mil/hioshoppingcart/.

Messages and Talking Points

MAIN MESSAGES

1. Local foods are those eaten on the economy and/or from sources not approved by U.S. military preventive medicine and veterinary personnel.
2. Although eating local may be good for relationship building, it does carry some risk for foodborne illnesses.
3. Prevention of foodborne and other illnesses is key to ensuring military operational readiness.
4. Educated choices regarding the types of local food you eat can help to reduce the risk of foodborne illness.
5. Always seek command guidance before eating food that is not approved by U.S. military preventive medicine or veterinary personnel.

TALKING POINTS

1. *Local foods are those eaten on the economy and/or from sources not approved by U.S. military preventive medicine and veterinary personnel.*
   - » Local foods are found off-FOB and also on-FOB in some host country owned and operated food establishments.
   - » Do not assume local foods eaten on-FOB are from approved sources.
   - » Local foods are often eaten as part of elder meetings and other counterinsurgency (COIN) activities during which U.S. forces interact with local populations.
2. *Although eating local enables relationship building, it does carry some risk for foodborne illnesses.*
   - » At times, U.S. forces may be required to eat local foods with community leaders and residents.
   - » Eating local allows for enhanced understanding and learning of customs between U.S. forces and local communities.
   - » The practice can improve working relationships, trust and morale.
   - » Being invited to dine with locals is generally considered an honor and is a powerful way to build trust. Cultural sensitivity and tact are critical. While refusing food can offend local partners, personnel should understand command guidance before eating from unapproved sources.
   - » Those not accustomed to eating local foods may be more susceptible to foodborne illness.
   - » Because local foods do not go through the same approval process by preventive medicine and veterinary personnel as U.S. military provided foods, they are not subjected to the same level of scrutiny to determine their safety. Thus, the safety of local foods cannot be guaranteed.

3. *Prevention of foodborne and other illnesses is key to ensuring military operational readiness.*

   » Gastrointestinal illness, such as diarrhea, is common among deployed U.S. military personnel[1,2,3,4].

   » Foodborne illness may be relatively short in duration (hours or days) or severe, long-term or chronic, and even life-threatening. Potential for lost duty days, decreased performance and prolonged illness exists.

   » Common symptoms of foodborne illness include:

      - nausea
      - vomiting
      - diarrhea
      - fever

      Seek medical attention if you experience any of these symptoms.

4. *Educated choices regarding the types of local food you eat can help to reduce the risk of foodborne illness.*

   » Certain foods can carry a higher risk of foodborne illness than others.

   » Foods that generally carry **lower** risk of foodborne illness and should be eaten with caution include:

      - Breads
      - Fully cooked vegetables, beans and rice that are kept and served hot
      - Boiled or well done meats such as lamb, beef, poultry and fish that are eaten within 2 hours after cooking
      - Hard-skin fruits and vegetables that you peel yourself (bananas, oranges, limes)
      - Hot tea
      - Bottled water or canned carbonated drinks that you open yourself

   » Foods that may carry **higher** risk of foodborne illness and should be avoided when possible include:

      - Milk and dairy products (cheese, ice cream and butter)
      - Partially cooked or raw meats or fish
      - Raw, leafy vegetables
      - Leftovers, take-home, or doggie bags
      - Opened/unsealed beverage containers of any sort
      - Ice, iced drinks, iced desserts and juices
      - Locally canned or packaged products

5. *Always seek command guidance before eating food that is not approved by U.S. military preventive medicine or veterinary personnel.*

   » Being invited to dine with locals is generally considered an honor and is a powerful way to build trust. Cultural sensitivity and tact are critical. Refusing food can offend partners.

   » If you have questions about whether or not to eat a particular food, use your chain of command or ask preventive medicine or veterinary personnel.

Frequently Asked Questions and Answers

1: Is diarrhea a big problem in theater?

A: Diarrhea is very common in theater and can negatively impact unit readiness because lost duty days and decreased performance may occur.

2: What are foodborne illnesses?

A: Foodborne illnesses are defined as diseases, usually infectious or toxic in nature, that are caused by agents that enter the body through eating food[5].

3: Is all diarrhea caused by foodborne illness?

A: No. Diarrhea can be caused by a number of different things including foodborne illnesses, other illnesses, stress, certain medications, and changes in eating habits.

4: What are the symptoms of foodborne illness?

A: Common symptoms of foodborne illness include:

- nausea
- vomiting
- diarrhea
- fever

5: What should I do if I am experiencing the symptoms of foodborne illness?

A: Seek medical attention if you experience any of the symptoms of foodborne illness.

6: How do I know if I have a foodborne illness?

A: The only way to know for sure if you have a foodborne illness is to see a healthcare provider who can perform diagnostic tests to help identify the cause of your symptoms.

7: Why is it sometimes important to eat local foods in theater?

A: Eating with local populations can serve as an important part of counterinsurgency (COIN) operations. Eating local allows for enhanced understanding and exchange of customs between U.S. forces and local communities. The practice can improve working relationships, trust and morale.

8: Which local foods should I choose and which should I avoid eating when I have a choice?

A: When you have a choice regarding what local foods to eat:

Choose foods that generally carry lower risk of foodborne illness, such as:

- Breads
- Fully cooked vegetables, beans and rice that are kept and served hot
- Boiled or well done meats such as lamb, beef, poultry and fish that are eaten within 2 hours after cooking
- Hard-skin fruits and vegetables that you peel yourself (bananas, oranges, limes)
- Hot tea
- Bottled water or canned carbonated drinks that you open yourself

Avoid foods that may carry higher risk of foodborne illness, such as:

- Milk and dairy products (cheese, ice cream and butter)
- Partially cooked or raw meats or fish
- Raw, leafy vegetables
- Leftovers, take-home, or “doggie bags”
- Opened/unsealed beverage containers
- Ice, iced drinks, iced desserts and juices
- Locally canned or packaged products

9: What should I do if I have questions about whether or not to eat a particular food?

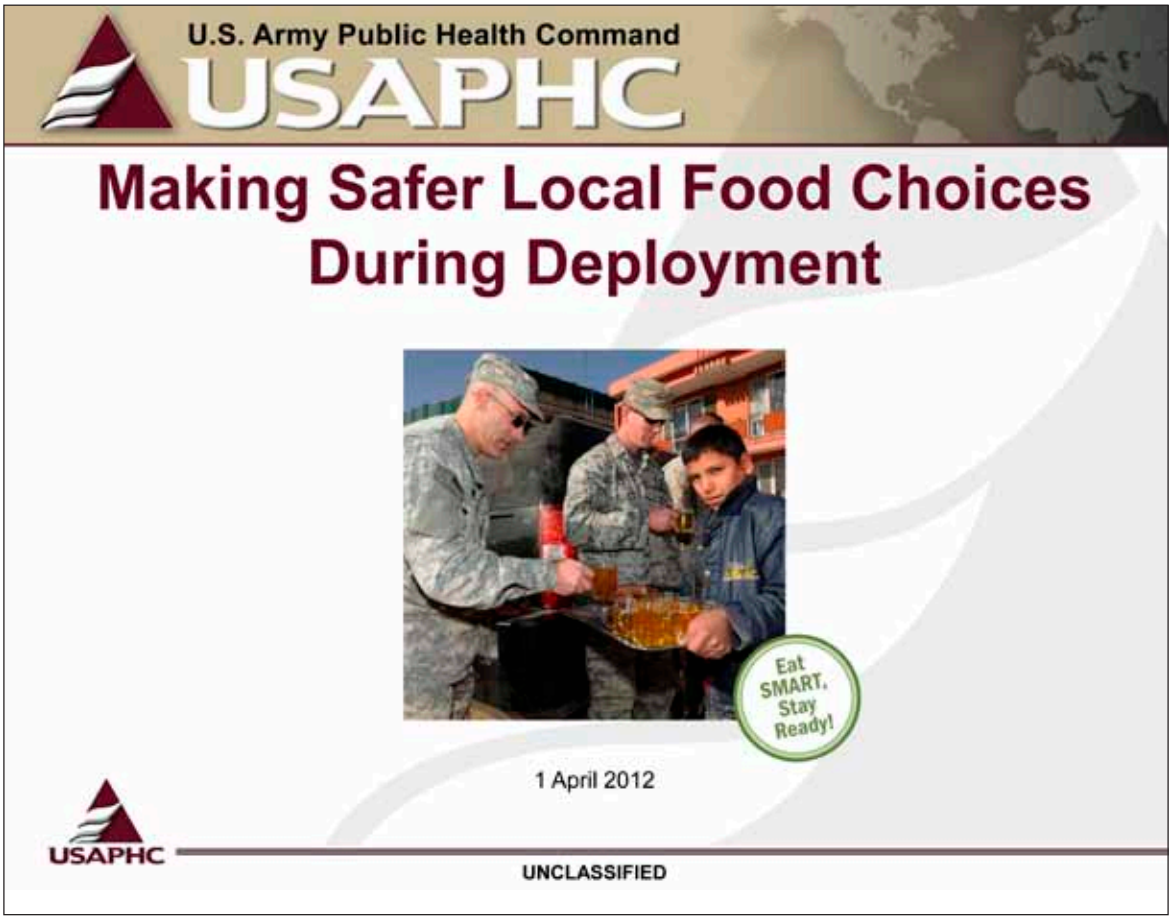
A: If you have questions about whether or not to eat a particular food, use your chain of command or ask preventive medicine or veterinary personnel.

10: What can I do to prevent foodborne illness?

A: To prevent foodborne illness, make smart food choices by picking lower risk foods and follow the guidance from your command.

Briefing: Making Safer Local Food Choices During Deployment

http://phc.amedd.army.mil/PHC%20Resource%20Library/Deployment_Food_Risk_Briefing.pdf



Deployment Food Risk Smart Card: Leader's Tips for Eating Local

https://usaphcapps.amedd.army.mil/hioshoppingcart/viewItem.aspx?id=461

Deployment Food Risk Smart Card

Leader's Tips for Eating Local

Don't let food bring your unit down!

Help your personnel make smart local food choices.

Leaders should use this card as a quick reference while deployed. The card contains information about health risks that may result from the consumption of local foods and information about safer food choices. Local foods are those eaten on the economy and/or from sources not approved by U.S. military preventive medicine and veterinary personnel. They are found off-Forward Operating Base (FOB) and also on-FOB in host country owned and operated food establishments. Do not assume local foods eaten on-FOB are from approved sources.

Leader's Responsibility

Commanders are responsible for implementing an effective Force Health Protection (FHP) program, and Service members and Civilian personnel are responsible for complying with prevention measures.

Prevention of illness is key to ensuring military operational readiness. Gastrointestinal illness, such as diarrhea, commonly afflicts deployed U.S. military personnel and can adversely affect operational readiness.

Increased Exposure to Local Foods

Recent changes in strategy and the importance placed on counterinsurgency (COIN) operations in a number of countries around the world have increased the amount of time certain personnel spend off base, immersed in the lives of local populations[1,2]. Part of this cultural immersion involves participating in local customs and dining with local populations, which increases exposure to local foods.

Being invited to dine with locals is generally considered an honor and is a powerful way to build trust. Cultural sensitivity and tact are critical. Refusing food can offend partners. Certain foods, however, carry a higher risk of foodborne illness than others and should be avoided.

What Risks Are Involved With Eating Local?

At times, U.S. forces may choose or be required to eat local foods with community leaders and residents. Eating local allows for enhanced understanding and exchange of customs between U.S. forces and local communities. The practice can create significant bonding and improve working relationships, trust and morale.

Although eating local may be good for relationship building, it does carry some risk. Those not accustomed to eating local foods may be more susceptible to foodborne illnesses. Foodborne illness may be relatively short in duration (hours or days) or severe, long-term or chronic, and even life-threatening. Potential for lost duty days, decreased performance, or even mission failure exists.

In addition, when eating local food, Service members should also be aware of the potential for intentional food contamination and poisoning risks by enemy forces. Maintaining situational awareness is critical.

When to Seek Medical Attention

If Service members experience any of the following symptoms, have them seek immediate medical attention. Common symptoms of foodborne illness include:

- Nausea
- Vomiting
- Diarrhea
- Fever

Deployment Food Risk Smart Card: Tips for Eating Local

https://usaphcapps.amedd.army.mil/hioshoppingcart/viewItem.aspx?id=462

Deployment Food Risk Smart Card

Tips for Eating Local

Don't let food bring you down!

Make smart local food choices during deployment.

This card contains information about potential health risks from eating local foods. Local foods are those eaten on the economy or from sources not approved by U.S. military preventive medicine and veterinary personnel. They are found off-Forward Operating Base (FOB) and also on-FOB in some locally owned and operated food establishments. Do not assume local foods eaten on-FOB are from approved sources.

Risk

At times, you may need to eat local foods with community leaders and residents. Eating local allows for better understanding and exchange of customs between U.S. forces and local communities. The practice can improve working relationships, trust and morale.

Although eating local may be good for building relationships, it does carry some risk. Those who are not accustomed to local foods may be more likely to get foodborne illnesses. These illnesses may be relatively short in duration (hours or days) or severe, long-term, and even life-threatening. Lost duty days, decreased performance and prolonged illness are possible. In addition, when eating local food, you should be aware that enemy forces could intentionally contaminate or poison food. Maintaining situational awareness is critical.

Symptoms of Foodborne Illness

Common symptoms of foodborne illness include:

- nausea
- vomiting
- diarrhea
- fever

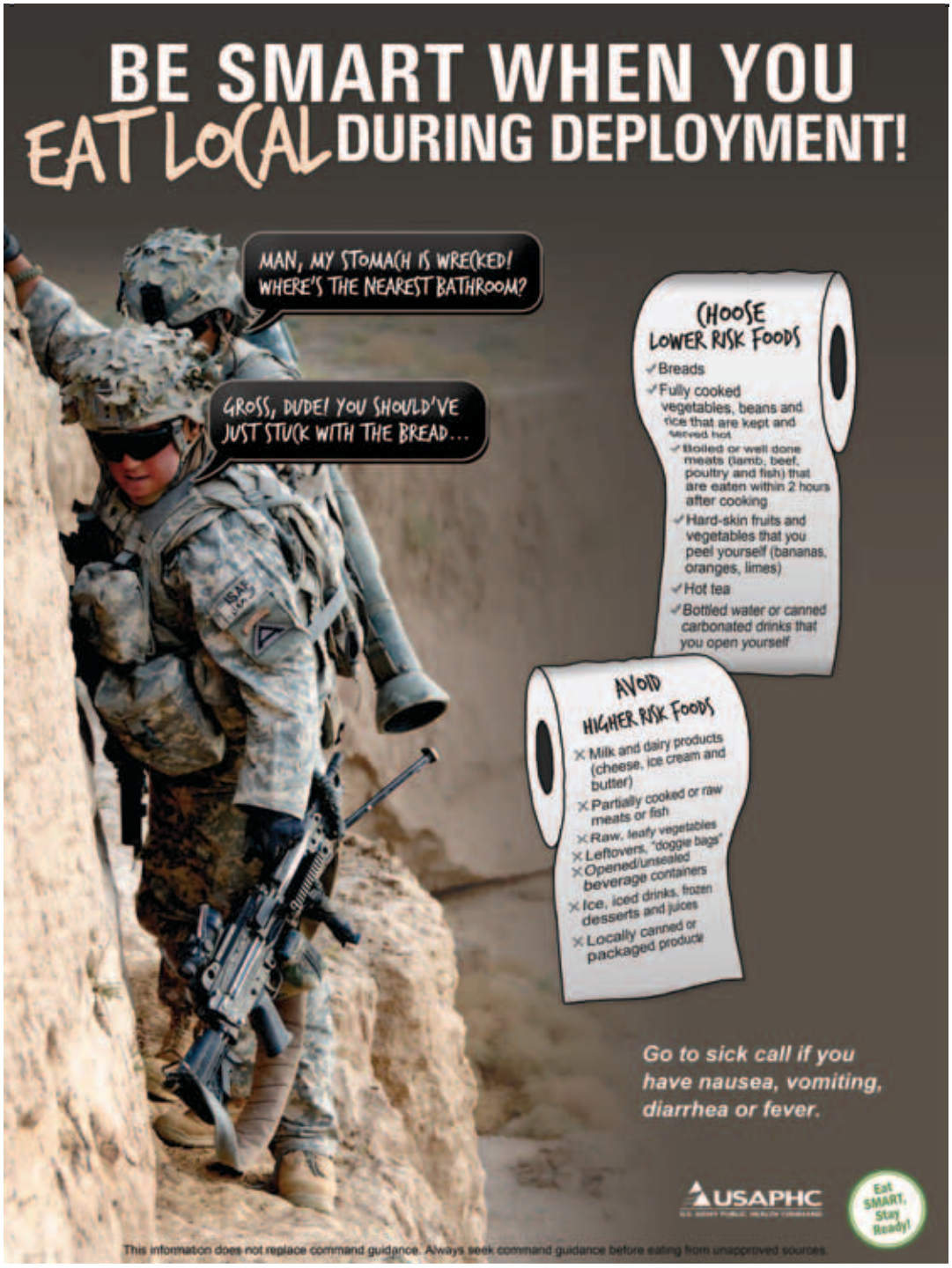
Seek medical attention if you experience any of these symptoms.

Local Customs

Being invited to dine with locals is generally considered an honor and is a powerful way to build trust. Cultural sensitivity and tact are critical. Refusing food can offend partners. Always seek command guidance before dining.

Smart Food Choices Poster

https://usaphcapps.amedd.army.mil/hioshoppingcart/viewItem.aspx?id=460



Smart Food Choices Sticker

https://usaphcapps.amedd.army.mil/hioshoppingcart/viewItem.aspx?id=463

Smart Food Choices eCard

https://usaphcapps.amedd.army.mil/hioshoppingcart/viewItem.aspx?id=471

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[1]Riddle MS, Tribble DR, Putnam SD, Mostafa M, Brown TR, Letizia A, Armstrong AW, & Sanders JW. 2008. Past trends and current status of self-reported incidence and impact of disease and nonbattle injury in military operations in Southwest Asia and the Middle East. *American Journal of Public Health, 98*(12), 2199-2206.

[2]Sanders JW, Putnam SD, Frankart C, Frenck RW, Monteville MR, Riddle MS, Rockabrand DM, Sharp TW, & Tribble DR. 2005. Impact of illness and non-combat injury during Operations Iraqi Freedom and Enduring Freedom (Afghanistan). *American Journal of Tropical Medicine and Hygiene, 73*(4), 713-719.

[3]Sanders JW, Punam SD, Riddle MS, Tribble DR, Jobanputra NK, Jones JJ, Scott DA & Frenck RW. 2004. The epidemiology of self-reported diarrhea in operations Iraqi Freedom and Enduring Freedom. *Diagnostic Microbiology and Infectious Disease, 50*, 89-93.

[4]Putnam SD, Sanders JW, Frenck RW, Monteville M, Riddle MS, Rockabrand DM, Sharp TW, Frankart C, & Tribble, DR. 2006. Self-reported description of diarrhea among military populations in Operations Iraqi Freedom and Enduring Freedom. *Journal of Travel Medicine, 13*(2), 92-99.

[5]World Health Organization. 2007. Fact Sheet: Food safety and foodborne illness. Retrieved online 20 April 2011 at http://www.who.int/mediacentre/factsheets/fs237/en/.

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