

Salmonella

Disease Fact Sheet

What is salmonella?

Salmonella is a bacteria that can cause an intestinal illness in people and animals. There are over 2,000 known subtypes of the salmonella bacteria.

What are the symptoms?

Typical symptoms are diarrhea, fever, abdominal cramps, headache, loss of appetite, nausea and sometimes vomiting. Dehydration, especially in children and infants, may occur. Symptoms usually last 3-10 days. Some people and most animals may have no symptoms.

How soon do symptoms appear?

The incubation period can range from 6 to 72 hours, with an average 12 to 36 hours.

How do you get it?

Salmonella is transmitted by fecal-->oral spread. The bacteria is shed in the feces (stools) of people and animals infected with salmonella. You get salmonella by eating food or drinking beverages that have been contaminated with feces from infected people or animals. You can also get it if you contaminate your own hands cleaning up animal droppings or handling raw poultry and meat then eating with your hands or putting your hands in your mouth. The bacteria may be easily spread within the family unit and between small children. Once food has been contaminated, the bacteria can live on it and if the contaminated item is not refrigerated the bacteria will multiple increasing the risk of illness. Heat destroys the bacteria.

Salmonella is a very common bacteria. It is present on poultry, sometimes in beef and pork, and may be present in eggs and unpasteurized dairy products. The bacteria can be in a wide variety of animal droppings including mammals (dogs, cats, cows, sheep), reptiles (turtles, iguanas, snakes) and birds (chickens, turkeys and wild birds).

Salmonella may be in untreated stream water.

Salmonella is NOT spread by coughing or sneezing.

How do you find out if you have it?

Your doctor can order a stool culture test in which the bacteria is grown from a sample of your feces. Because the bacteria may be excreted intermittently, especially if you are not having any symptoms, sometimes you may have to send in 2 or 3 stool samples. An infected person will shed the bacteria while they are ill and for several days to weeks after they recover and no longer have symptoms.

How is it treated?

No specific treatment is indicated except bedrest and fluid replacement, unless illness occurs in infants, the elderly or debilitated or if the illness is severe or prolonged. The use of antibiotics may actually lengthen the time that you shed the bacteria in your stool.

How can you keep from getting it?

- Cook poultry, meats and eggs thoroughly.
- Take care when handling uncooked poultry or meat--don't lick your fingers or smoke a cigarette; wash the cutting board thoroughly before cutting anything else on it.
- Keep poultry, meat, eggs and foods containing these raw items refrigerated.
- Don't drink untreated water (stream, lake, etc.).
- Don't drink raw milk, or eat unpasteurized dairy products.
- Wash your hands after changing diapers.
- Keep children away from animal droppings.
- Wash hands after handling pets or cleaning pet cages.

How can you keep from spreading it if you have it?

WASH YOUR HANDS--after going to the bathroom, before fixing food, before wiping children's faces. Ill persons should not prepare food if it can be avoided. Those who prepare food outside the home should not return to work until your doctor tells you it's okay.

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