



Salmonellosis

February 2008

What is salmonellosis?

Salmonellosis is an infection of the digestive system caused by the bacteria *Salmonella*. There are thousands of *Salmonella* types and they occur in many domestic and wild animals.

How do you get salmonellosis?

Salmonella can live in the gut of humans or animals. Salmonellosis occurs when people ingest the bacteria. This can occur in a number of different ways:

- Eating undercooked meat (especially chicken) and raw or undercooked eggs.
- Eating cooked or ready to eat food such as vegetables that have come into contact with *Salmonella* bacteria from raw food. This is called **cross contamination** and can also happen when food comes into contact with contaminated surfaces such as chopping boards and cooking utensils that have been used for raw food.
- People with salmonellosis have the bacteria in their faeces. If they do not wash their hands properly after going to the toilet they can spread the bacteria to surfaces, objects, food and drinks that other people come into contact with.
- Not washing hands after changing the nappy of an infected infant.
- Not washing hands after handling animals with salmonellosis.

The illness may only last a few days, however occasionally the bacteria can remain in the faeces for months after symptoms have stopped. Although the risk of spreading salmonellosis is lower once the symptoms have stopped, it is possible to pass on the bacteria while it is still present in the faeces, so hand washing after going to the toilet is very important.

What are the signs and symptoms of salmonellosis?

Symptoms occur between 6 - 72 hours (usually 12 - 36 hours) after exposure to *Salmonella* and symptoms last for 2 - 7 days. Most people recover without treatment however illness is usually worse in the elderly and infants.

Symptoms may include:

- diarrhoea
- stomach cramps
- fever
- loss of appetite
- headache
- nausea and vomiting.



How do I get treated?

Salmonellosis usually resolves without treatment and most people recover within 2 - 7 days.

- Drink plenty of fluids such as plain water or oral rehydration drinks (available from pharmacies).
- Antibiotics are seldom prescribed because they do not speed up recovery and can actually lead to *Salmonella* being carried in the digestive system for longer. Infants, the elderly and people with immune suppression may require antibiotics. Consult your GP or a doctor of your choice.
- Avoid anti-vomiting or anti-diarrhoeal medications unless prescribed or recommended by a doctor.

What do I do if I have salmonellosis?

- Do not go to work for at least 24 hours after symptoms have stopped.
- Do not handle or prepare food for the family or household for at least 24 hours after symptoms have stopped.
- Keep children home from school for at least 24 hours after symptoms have stopped.
- People in hospitals, nursing homes and other residential facilities should be nursed in their own room, with a private bathroom for at least 24 hours after symptoms have stopped.
- Immediately remove and wash any clothes or bedding contaminated with vomit or diarrhoea using soap and hot water.
- Thoroughly clean and disinfect contaminated surfaces immediately after an episode of illness by using a bleach-based household cleaner.

How do I reduce the risks of getting salmonellosis?

- Wash hands with soap and water after changing nappies, after handling animals, birds or pets and before preparing or handling food or drinks. To wash your hands effectively, lather thoroughly with soap and running water for at least 15 seconds. Dry your hands with a clean single use towel (e.g. paper towel) and turn the tap off with the towel to avoid possible recontamination.
- If hand washing facilities are not available use an alcohol-based gel.
- Keep cold food below 5°C and hot food above 60°C.
- Make sure foods are thoroughly cooked.
- Don't use dirty or cracked eggs.
- Refrigerate any foods suspected of having caused the illness as they may be needed for analysis.

Where can I find more information on salmonellosis?

For further information contact your GP, a doctor of your choice or Health Direct (1800 022 222).

Produced by Communicable Disease Control Directorate

© Department of Health, Western Australia December 2007

http://www.public.health.wa.gov.au/2/595/2/salmonellosis_f.pm

