

Salmonellosis

Your questions answered

What is salmonellosis?

Salmonellosis is an infection caused by bacteria called Salmonella. Most persons infected with Salmonella develop diarrhea, fever and abdominal cramps 12 to 72 hours after infection. However, in some people, the diarrhea may be so severe that the patient needs to be hospitalized. In these patients, the Salmonella infection may spread from the intestines to the blood stream, and then to other body sites and can cause death unless the person is treated promptly with antibiotics. The elderly, infants and those with impaired immune systems are more likely to have a severe illness.

How do people get a Salmonella infection?

Salmonella live in the intestinal tracts of humans and other animals, including birds. Salmonella are usually transmitted to humans by eating foods contaminated with animal feces. Contaminated foods usually look and smell normal. Contaminated foods are often of animal origin, such as beef, poultry, milk or eggs, but any food, including vegetables, may become contaminated. Thorough cooking kills Salmonella. Food may also become contaminated by the hands of an infected food handler who did not wash hands with soap after using the bathroom. Salmonella may also be found in the feces of some pets, especially those with diarrhea, and people can become infected if they do not wash their hands after contact with pets or pet feces. Reptiles, such as turtles, lizards, and snakes, are particularly likely to harbor Salmonella. Many chicks and young birds carry Salmonella in their feces. People should always wash their hands immediately after handling a reptile or bird, even if the animal is healthy. Adults should also assure that children wash their hands after handling a reptile or bird or after touching its environment.

How can Salmonella infections be diagnosed?

Many different kinds of illnesses can cause diarrhea, fever, or abdominal cramps. Determining that Salmonella is the cause of the illness depends on laboratory tests that identify Salmonella in an infected person's feces. Once Salmonella has been identified, further testing can determine its specific type.

How can Salmonella infections be treated?

Salmonella infections usually resolve in five to seven days and often do not require treatment other than oral fluids. Persons with severe diarrhea may require rehydration with intravenous fluids. Antibiotics are not usually necessary unless the infection spreads from the intestines. Some Salmonella bacteria have become resistant to antibiotics, largely as a

What Can **YOU** Do?

How common is salmonellosis?

result of the use of antibiotics to promote the growth of food animals. Every year, approximately 40,000 cases of salmonellosis are reported in the United States. Because many milder cases are not diagnosed or reported, the actual number of infections may be 30 or more times greater. There are many different kinds of Salmonella bacteria. Salmonella serotype Typhimurium and Salmonella serotype Enteritidis are the most common in the United States. Salmonellosis is more common in the summer than winter.

Children are the most likely to get salmonellosis. The rate of diagnosed infections in children age 5 and younger is higher than the rate in all other persons. Young children, the elderly and the immunocompromised are the most likely to have severe infections. It is estimated that approximately 400 persons die each year with acute salmonellosis.

How can I prevent a Salmonella infection?

- Cook poultry, ground beef and eggs thoroughly. Do not eat or drink foods containing raw eggs or raw (unpasteurized) milk.
- If you are served undercooked meat, poultry or eggs in a restaurant, don't hesitate to send it back to the kitchen for further cooking.
- Wash hands, kitchen work surfaces and utensils with soap and water immediately after they have been in contact with raw meat or poultry.
- Be particularly careful with foods prepared for infants, the elderly and the immunocompromised.
- Wash hands with soap after handling reptiles, birds or baby chicks and after contact with pet feces.
- Avoid direct or even indirect contact between reptiles (turtles, iguanas, other lizards, snakes) and infants or immunocompromised persons.
- Don't work with raw poultry or meat and an infant (e.g., feed, change diaper) at the same time.
- Mother's milk is the safest food for young infants. Breastfeeding prevents salmonellosis and many other health problems.

This fact sheet is for information only and is not intended for self-diagnosis or as a substitute for consultation. If you have any questions about the disease described above or think that you may have an infection, consult with your health-care provider. This fact sheet is based on the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention's Health and Safety topic fact sheets.

UPDATED 12/8/11

For more information on salmonellosis, call the Lawrence-Douglas County Health Department at **(785) 843-0721** or visit us on the web at: www.ldchealth.org