

Public Health Advice Salmonella

Infection Prevention Team & Health Protection Team

What is salmonella?

Salmonella bacteria cause food poisoning. Symptoms include diarrhoea, stomach cramps and sometimes vomiting and fever. Most people recover without treatment, but if they become seriously ill they may require hospital care because the dehydration caused by the illness can be life-threatening.

Incubation period

12 to 72 hours for the symptoms to develop after swallowing an infectious dose of salmonella. Symptoms usually last for four to seven days and clear up without treatment. Common clinical features diarrhoea, vomiting and fever.

Sources of salmonella

Gastrointestinal tract of wild and domestic animals, birds (especially poultry), reptiles, amphibians (for example terrapins), and occasionally humans.

Transmission

Predominantly from foodstuffs (most commonly red and white meats, raw eggs, milk, and dairy products) following contamination of cooked food by raw food or failing to achieve adequate cooking temperatures. Person to person spread from a case by close contact, usually during the acute diarrhoeal phase of the illness. Contact with infected animals.

Who gets salmonella?

Anyone can get salmonella, but young children, the elderly and people who are immunosuppressed have a greater risk of becoming severely ill.

How do you get infected with salmonella?

You usually get salmonella by eating contaminated food. Salmonella bacteria live in the gut of many farm animals and can affect meat, eggs, poultry, and milk. Other foods like green vegetables, fruit and shellfish can become contaminated through contact with manure in the soil or sewage in the water.

Contamination is also possible if raw and cooked foods are stored together.

Most tortoises and terrapins and other pet reptiles can also carry salmonella. Dogs, cats, and rodents can occasionally become infected.

It is impossible to tell from its appearance whether food is contaminated with salmonella. It will look, smell and taste normal.

Salmonella can be spread from person to person by poor hygiene, by failing to wash hands properly after going to the toilet, or after handling contaminated food.

How can you avoid getting infected with salmonella?

Wash your hands thoroughly with soap and warm water:-

- before preparing and eating food
- after handling raw food
- after going to the toilet or changing a baby's nappy
- after contact with pets and other animals, especially reptiles and amphibians
- after working in the garden

Keep cooked food away from raw food

Store raw foods below cooked or ready-to-eat foods in the fridge to prevent contamination.

Wash raw fruits and vegetables thoroughly before eating.

Cook food thoroughly, especially meat, so that it is piping hot.

Keep all kitchen surfaces and equipment including knives, chopping boards and dish cloths clean.

Do not drink untreated water from lakes, rivers or streams.

If someone has salmonella, wash all dirty clothes, bedding and towels in the washing machine on the hottest cycle possible. Clean toilet seats, toilet bowls, flush handles, taps and wash hand basins after use with detergent and hot water, followed by a household disinfectant.

How do you treat salmonella?

It is important to encourage fluids as diarrhoea or vomiting can lead to dehydration.

Sometimes severe cases are treated with antibiotics. Please contact the local microbiologist for antibiotic advice if considering treating the patient with antibiotics. If the patient is given antibiotics it is essential that they complete the course as prescribed

Do patients need to stay off work or school?

Yes. While they are ill and have symptoms, they are infectious. Children and adults should stay away from nursery, school or work for 48 hours after the symptoms have stopped.

The patient should tell their employer they have salmonella if they work with vulnerable groups such as the elderly, the young, those in poor health, or if they handle food.

Health Protection Team
Public Health Wales
Mamhilad House
Mamhilad Park Estate
Mamhilad
PONTYPOOL
South Wales
0300 003 0032

Aneurin Bevan University Health Board
Infection Prevention Team
Nevill Hall Hospital: 01873 732048
Royal Gwent Hospital: 01633 238101
Community Hospitals: 07903 324603

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