

SALMONELLOSIS (SAL-mon-elle-O-sis)

What is salmonellosis?

Salmonellosis is an infection of the intestine caused by bacteria called Salmonella. Salmonella is carried by humans and animals in their stool (feces). Humans get the infection by ingesting the bacteria.

How does a person get salmonellosis?

Salmonellosis usually occurs when people eat food contaminated with the bacteria. Salmonella bacteria are commonly found in the intestine of livestock, poultry, cats, dogs, rats, turtles, exotic pets (e.g. iguanas) and other animals. It has also been found in egg and egg products and on unwashed fruits, vegetables and hard-to-clean foods (e.g. sprouts, clover). Any raw meats may carry salmonella. If these foods are not properly cooked, the bacteria can survive to cause illness when these foods are eaten.

Salmonella can be passed from person to person. The bacteria are passed in the stool (feces) and make their way to another person on unwashed hands, contaminated food or objects. The bacteria can then be swallowed by another person making them ill.

What are the symptoms?

Most people become ill within 6 to 72 hours after swallowing the bacteria. The bacteria can cause diarrhea (frequent and watery bowel movements), fever chills, headache and sometimes vomiting. The illness can last from several days to several weeks but most people are ill for 4 to 7 days. Dehydration is possible when diarrhea is severe. In a small number of cases, salmonella infection is dangerous and can be life threatening to infants, children, the elderly or people with immune system disorders. Some rare complications due to the bacteria include some degree of joint pain, eye irritation or painful urination called "Reiter's syndrome".

When is an infected person contagious?

The infectious period varies from several days to many months but a person is most contagious while having diarrhea.

How can you prevent salmonellosis infection?

- **Thorough hand washing is the best prevention.** Make sure hands are properly washed with soap and water after using the toilet, changing diapers, touching animals (or their feces) before eating and before and after preparing foods. Wash hands after touching and preparing raw meats.
- **Wash fruits and vegetables well before eating.**
- **Don't eat raw or undercooked meat and eggs.** Cook meat, poultry and egg products thoroughly. Cook stuffing separately from the bird.
- **Using a food thermometer,** make sure that the inside of meat is cooked to a temperature of 74°C (165F). Wash and disinfect cutting boards, counter tops, knives and other utensils after contact with raw meats and poultry, especially before using these areas to prepare other foods. Throw out used meat packaging.

- **Keep raw foods away** from cooked foods during food preparation and storage.
- **If you have diarrhea, avoid preparing and serving food** and be sure to contact your doctor.
- **Avoid unpasteurized milk and cheese products.** Never sample raw milk directly from the animal. Avoid using raw eggs (for example in homemade egg-nogs, salad dressings, ice cream and mayonnaise) and never use dirty or cracked eggs.
- **Drink water from a safe supply.** If you drink well water, have it tested to ensure it is safe to drink.
- **Turtles, chicks, ducks, and exotic pets, such as iguanas, salamanders and hedgehogs, may carry Salmonella.** If these animals are household pets see Fact Sheet 5.4.7 – Reptile Safety Tips on how to prevent the spread of salmonella from reptiles.

For more information please contact 1-800-958-6400 or the local Public Health Nursing Office.