

Salmonellosis

What is salmonellosis?

Salmonellosis is a disease of the intestines caused by a bacterium called *Salmonella*.

Who gets salmonellosis?

Any person can get salmonellosis, but it is recognized more often in infants and children. The elderly, infants, and those with impaired immune systems are more likely to experience severe illness.

How is salmonellosis spread?

Salmonella must be swallowed to cause disease. Therefore, it may be spread by eating contaminated food (e.g., eggs and poultry products, fruit, vegetables, etc.) that has not been cooked enough to kill the bacteria, or by drinking contaminated water or milk. Infection can also occur after eating, smoking, or touching the mouth if hands are contaminated with the bacteria. Infected persons can spread the bacteria if they do not wash their hands properly after going to the bathroom and then handle food that other people eat. People can also be infected with *Salmonella* if hands are not washed well after contact with infected animals (especially poultry, pigs, cows, rodents, and pets such as dogs, cats, lizards, turtles, chicks, and ducklings).

What are the symptoms of salmonellosis?

Symptoms of salmonellosis include diarrhea (non-bloody), abdominal cramps, headache, fever, and sometimes vomiting.

How soon after exposure do symptoms appear?

Symptoms may appear anywhere from 6 hours to 3 days or more after exposure, but usually appear within 12 to 36 hours after exposure.

How is salmonellosis diagnosed?

Salmonellosis is diagnosed by laboratory testing of feces (stool).

What is the treatment for salmonellosis?

Most people with salmonellosis recover without treatment. Persons with diarrhea should drink plenty of fluids to prevent dehydration. Antibiotics and anti-diarrhea drugs are generally not recommended for mild to moderate cases. Persons with severe salmonellosis may require admission to a hospital for intravenous (I.V.) fluids and antibiotics.

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How can salmonellosis be prevented?

Hand Hygiene

- Wash hands carefully before and after food preparation and after toileting or changing diapers.

Safe Food Handling

- Refrigerate foods promptly; minimize holding foods at room temperature.
- Always treat raw poultry, beef, pork, and egg products as if they were contaminated.
- Wrap fresh meats in plastic bags at the market to prevent fluids from dripping on other foods in the grocery cart.
- Avoid eating raw or undercooked eggs (or foods made with raw eggs), poultry, and meats.
- Avoid drinking raw milk.
- Ensure that cooked foods reach the correct internal temperature, especially when using a microwave.
- Wash raw fruits and vegetables prior to eating or chopping.
- Disinfect food cutting boards, counters, and utensils after each use (1 tsp. liquid household bleach per gallon of water is effective - prepare the bleach solution fresh daily). Do not rinse. Let air dry.

Contact with animals

- Avoid chicks, ducklings, turtles, and other reptiles as pets for small children.
- Do not allow children to handle pet foods or pet treats.
- Supervise children at farms, petting zoos, and other environments where they may have contact with livestock (e.g., calves, sheep, goats, etc.).
- Assure that children wash their hands after touching animals.

How long can an infected person carry *Salmonella* bacteria?

Most people carry the bacteria for several days to several weeks after illness. A small percentage carry the bacteria for a year or longer.

Should an infected person be excluded from work or school?

People who have diarrhea should not work as food handlers or provide care for children, elderly people, or people at high risk for serious illness. Children who have diarrhea should not go to childcare facilities. Most infected people may return to work or school when diarrhea stops, provided that they are careful to wash their hands properly after using the toilet. In some situations, people who may be carrying *Salmonella* may need to be excluded from high-risk environments until they have no *Salmonella* in their stool. The local health department will determine when persons infected with *Salmonella* may safely return to work or school.

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How can I get more information about salmonellosis?

- 1) If you have concerns about salmonellosis, contact your healthcare provider.
- 2) Call your local health department. A directory of local health departments is located at <http://www.vdh.virginia.gov/LHD/index.htm>.
- 3) Visit the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention website at <http://www.cdc.gov/salmonella/>.