

What is salmonella?

Salmonella is a food poisoning bacteria. It is the second most common bacterial cause of gastrointestinal illness in the UK.

What illness results?

For some patients the illness begins with flu-like symptoms while for others the onset is sudden with diarrhoea, stomach cramps, headaches, fever, nausea and vomiting. The incubation period (the time from first swallowing the bacteria to becoming ill) is normally 12-36 hours. The illness usually lasts 3-7 days.

Should I see my GP?

You should consult your GP if one or more of the following applies to you:

- there is blood in your diarrhoea
- you have severe abdominal pain
- the diarrhoea has lasted for 48 hours

Where does salmonella come from?

Salmonella is found in the gut of many wild and domestic animals, including birds (especially poultry), pigs, cattle, and pets such as cats, dogs, snakes, lizards and other reptiles and amphibians.

How does it spread?

- Food is the commonest source of infection
- From contact with animals
- From contact with people who are infected
- Eating unwashed/unpeeled fruit or vegetables

How can infection be prevented?

- Cook food thoroughly and pay particular attention to defrosting before cooking frozen foods.
- Use separate chopping boards for cooked and uncooked meats, and raw vegetables.
- Cover and store raw meat separately from other produce in the fridge, preferably on the bottom shelf to prevent juices dripping on cooked or ready to eat foods.
- Avoid eating or drinking raw or undercooked food such as eggs, unpasteurised milk, or cheese made from unpasteurised milk.
- Store eggs in the fridge, and do not use cracked or dirty ones.
- When travelling abroad select foods that are cooked and served hot. Avoid raw fruit and vegetables that have not been cooked or peeled, such as salads.
- Wash hands thoroughly after contact with all animals and their faeces, after using the toilet or changing nappies.

How should hands be washed?

Always use warm, running water and a mild, preferably liquid, soap. (It is not necessary to use soaps labelled as antiseptic or antibacterial.)

- Wet hands and apply a small amount of soap
- Rub hands together vigorously for 10-15 seconds
- Pay special attention to areas between fingers, finger tips, and palms.
- Rinse hands under warm running water
- Dry thoroughly on a clean dry towel.

How are infections treated?

Most people recover without any specific treatment. Extra fluids are important, especially for babies, children, pregnant women and the elderly. Clear fluids such as water and diluted fruit juices are recommended.

You will be visited by an officer from Environmental Health who will try to find out where the infection may have come from.

All persons with diarrhoea should remain off work or school until they have had no symptoms for 48 hours.

Pre-school children cannot attend nursery or other childcare groups until samples show that they are no longer infected.

If someone in your household has salmonella:

- The infected person should not prepare food.
- Soiled bedding and clothes should be washed on the hot cycle of your washing machine.
- Clean surfaces (toilet seats, flush handles, door handles and taps) at least daily with bleach diluted as per manufacturer's instructions.
- If cleaning up diarrhoea or vomit, wear rubber gloves; wash the surface with hot soapy water, rinse, and allow to dry. Use paper towels or disposable cloths. Dispose of used cloths immediately (e.g. in a carrier bag).
- The infected person should not share towels/flannels with anyone.

For further information see:
www.foodstandards.gov.uk

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