

Salmonella

FACT SHEET

What are *Salmonella*?

Salmonella are bacterium that cause diarrheal illness. They live in the intestinal tracts of humans and animals, including birds, and are usually passed through food that is contaminated with feces.

Contaminated foods are often animal products, such as meat, milk or eggs, but all food is at risk for contamination.

Salmonella have been known to cause illness for more than 100 years. They were named after Salmon, the American scientist who discovered them.

What symptoms does *Salmonella* cause?

Salmonella cause an infection called salmonellosis that usually lasts 4 to 7 days. Most people develop diarrhea, fever and abdominal cramps about 12 to 72 hours after being infected.

Most people recover without treatment, but some people may have such severe diarrhea that they have to be hospitalized. In these people the infection may actually spread into their blood stream and other parts of the body. This can be fatal unless it is treated quickly with antibiotics.

Senior adults, infants and people with impaired immune systems are more likely to develop severe illness.

Who is at risk for salmonellosis?

Anyone is at risk for salmonellosis, but children are the most likely to get it. Children's hand hygiene is typically not as good as an adult's.

What should I do if I have the symptoms of salmonellosis?

If you develop symptoms of salmonellosis, including a fever, diarrhea and abdominal cramps, contact your health care provider.

How can I know for sure if I have salmonellosis?

Many illnesses can cause diarrhea, fever or abdominal cramps. In order to know for sure that *Salmonella* are causing the illness, a laboratory would have to test a person's stool for the bacterium.

How is salmonellosis treated?

Most people recover completely from salmonellosis in 5 to 7 days without treatment. A person who has severe diarrhea or dehydration may be treated with fluids. Antibiotics are usually not necessary unless the infection spreads from the intestines into the blood stream.

A small number of people infected with *Salmonella* may develop joint pain, eye irritation and painful urination. This is called Reiter's syndrome. It can last for months or year and can lead to chronic arthritis.

How can I protect myself from salmonellosis?

To protect yourself from salmonellosis, follow these guidelines:

- Use good food handling procedures.
- Sanitize cooking surfaces and utensils before preparing food.
- Store raw meats on the bottom shelf of the refrigerator in a container so their juices cannot drip on other foods.
- Cook poultry, ground meat and eggs thoroughly before eating them.
- Always wash your hands with soap and running water after using the restroom and before handling or eating food.
- Wash your hands after handling animals or cleaning up after them.
- Do not let children under age 5 handle reptiles or turtles.

How common is salmonellosis?

Every year there are approximately 40,000 cases of salmonellosis reported in the United States. In addition, many people who have a mild case don't contact their health care provider, so there are likely to be many more cases that go unreported.