

Salmonella: important information

What is Salmonella?

Salmonella infection is caused by a family of germs (bacteria) that live in the gut of many birds & animals. It is therefore present in foods leading to human gut infections. The diarrhoea that results can be severe lasting several days.

Cases are usually only seen in individuals or their families but can become larger outbreaks. It affects all ages but can be more severe in the very young or elderly, or those in hospital.

What are the symptoms?

The time taken from picking up *Salmonella* to becoming ill (incubation period) is between 6 hours and 3 days but can be longer. Often it is within 12-36 hours. People known as 'carriers' can have the germ in their stools for many months. Illness (symptoms) usually takes the form of:

- ❖ Loose stools (usually without blood or mucous)
- ❖ Abdominal (tummy) pain
- ❖ Fever, headache
- ❖ Nausea (feeling sick) and/or vomiting
- ❖ General tiredness

These symptoms usually clear up within 3 – 7 days but a small number of people take weeks to recover fully. Blood poisoning, abscesses & joint pains are more rare complications.

How does it spread?

An infected person (who is ill or a carrier) may contaminate foodstuffs by poor hand hygiene practice. The commonest route is by eating contaminated food or drinks such as raw (unpasteurised) milk or eggs, uncooked meats - especially poultry. It has also been found in a wide range of foods and products such as chocolate, cooked meats, baby milk, and salads. Buffets are a frequent source of outbreaks if good hygiene advice is not followed.

Germs can be spread by using common knives and chopping boards.

Contact with infected animals both farm and domestic (especially young animals under 6 months of age) carries a risk of infection.

Can it be prevented?

The risk of spreading *Salmonella* will be reduced if you practice the following:

1. Wash carefully & thoroughly all of the hands

after

- ❖ handling animals
- ❖ changing nappies
- ❖ visiting the toilet

and before

- ❖ cooking
- ❖ handling food
- ❖ feeding the young or elderly
- ❖ eating

2. Prepare food safely

- ❖ Clean food preparation surfaces with detergent and warm water
- ❖ Do not use the same chopping board/knife for raw meat or other foodstuffs without washing thoroughly
- ❖ Defrost poultry, meat and other meat products well before cooking
- ❖ Cook until the juices run clear and there are no pink bits inside
- ❖ Follow manufacturers instructions
- ❖ Remember cooked meat is stored at the top of the fridge and uncooked meat at the bottom
- ❖ Eat cooked food immediately or cool quickly and place in fridge or freezer
- ❖ Run the fridge at 5°C or below

- ❖ Re-heated foods should be piping hot
- ❖ Avoid drinking milk from bottles where the tops have been pecked by birds
- ❖ Try to keep pets out of the kitchen
- ❖ Lastly, thoroughly wash all salad vegetables

3. Thoroughly cook food

Heating food to 70°C for at least 2 minutes destroys *Salmonella*. Ensure all meat (especially poultry) is thoroughly cooked. Insist when eating out that food meant to be warm is served 'piping' hot.

4. Avoid 'raw' dairy products

Unpasteurised milk carries the greatest risk.

5. Drink only treated water

Where possible avoid drinking untreated water from rivers and streams. Consider using previously boiled water for drinks and tooth brushing with unchecked private water supplies.

Will I need treatment?

Generally individuals with *Salmonella* do not require treatment. They usually only need to take care to drink plenty water or other clear fluids. Some people find that low fat natural yoghurts and probiotic products (ones that contain small amounts of bacteria) can help to get the bowels back to normal.

The germ may take 2 to 7 weeks to clear out of the body so care should be taken not to infect others during this period. The greatest danger of passing it to others is early in the infection when the person is ill.

The GP should be contacted if symptoms become severe. Antibiotics may be prescribed in exceptional circumstances.

In most cases it is generally advised to wait until 48 hours after last having diarrhoea or sickness before returning to work or school/nursery. This period may be longer for some people and specimens to show the infection has cleared up may be needed. The Public Health Department will provide advice about this on a one to one basis.

Is there anything else?

This infection can only be controlled if we better understand how it was passed on. This may help to stop others getting infected. Your help with this is important.

A nurse or doctor from the Public Health Department or an Environmental Health Officer will be in touch to find out more information about the time leading up to the illness. They will want to know about who else may be at risk.

Need further advice or information?

- ❖ NHS Inform www.nhsinform.co.uk
- ❖ NHS24 ☎ 111 www.nhs24.co.uk
- ❖ www.nhsborders.scot.nhs.uk
- ❖ Local health clinic or GP

This document is available on request in different languages, audio tape, Braille format, large print or BSL DVD. Please contact:

NHS Borders on 01896 825522 or email equality@borders.scot.nhs.uk

Produced by: Public Health Dept, NHS Borders, Education Centre, Borders General Hospital, Melrose, TD6 9BD, 01896 825560

June 2014