

SALMONELLOSIS



October 2001

CAUSE:

Salmonellosis is an infection of the bowel caused by the salmonella bacteria.

SYMPTOMS:

How might it affect you?

The symptoms of salmonella infection include fever, headache, abdominal pain, diarrhoea, nausea and sometimes vomiting. Diarrhoea and loss of appetite often last for several days. The disease tends to be more severe in children, the elderly and those with impaired immune systems. Sometimes the infection spreads beyond the bowel to the blood and then to other parts of the body.

Is it serious?

Diarrhoea and vomiting especially in infants and the elderly may lead to severe dehydration, which may require treatment in hospital. Infections that have spread beyond the bowel may be serious and require hospital treatment.

How long will it last?

Diarrhoea usually improves within several days to a week but persists for longer in a small number of people. It may be several months before bowel habits are entirely normal. A small number of persons will go on to develop other symptoms.

OCCURRENCE:

How common is it?

About 2100 cases are reported to health authorities in Queensland every year (ie 50-60 cases per 100,000 population), but the actual number of cases is likely to be considerably greater.

Salmonellosis is more common in the summer than winter.

How likely are you to be affected?

Children are the most likely to get salmonellosis.

Animal handling, inadequate personal hygiene, inadequate food preparation practices and patting animals can also spread the salmonella germ. Travellers to less developed countries sometimes acquire the infection abroad.

NATURAL HISTORY:

How is it spread?

Salmonella live in the bowel of humans and animals, particularly birds.

People usually become infected by eating contaminated foods that may look and smell quite normal. Contaminated foods are often of animal origin, such as beef, poultry, milk, or eggs. However all foods, including vegetables may become contaminated, especially if raw foods come into contact with them. Many raw foods of animal origin are often contaminated, but fortunately, thorough cooking kills Salmonella. Food may also become contaminated by the hands of an infected person who fails to wash his or her hands thoroughly with soap and water after using the toilet. The germs can also pass from one person's hands directly to another person's mouth. Salmonella may also be found in the faeces of some pets, especially those with diarrhoea.

How long does it take to get sick when you catch the infection?

Symptoms can occur from 6 to 72 hours, although usually it is about 12 to 36 hours.

How long is it infectious?

People are infectious to others while they are ill and remain infectious for as long as the bacterium is present in the faeces. This can be from several days to several weeks, occasionally continuing for months, especially in infants.

TREATMENT:

What treatment is available?

People with Salmonella infections usually recover in 5-7 days and usually do not require any specific treatment. Antibiotics do not have a place in the routine treatment of salmonellosis, as they may prolong the length of time the germ persists in the bowel, and they do not help people recover any quicker. People with dehydration may require rehydration, sometimes with intravenous fluids. Oral replacement fluids are available from pharmacies.

It is important that children and the elderly, in particular, should see a doctor to avoid dehydration.

PREVENTION:

How can the spread of the disease be controlled?

People who have salmonellosis should wash their hands carefully and should not prepare food or drinks for others nor should they work in childcare or health care services until 24 hours after the bowel motions have returned to normal. Children with salmonellosis should be excluded from child care, kindergarten or pre-school facilities until 24 hours after the bowels motions have returned to normal. There is no need for children to be tested for clearance before returning to childcare, provided their bowel motions have returned to normal.

What can you do to prevent salmonellosis?

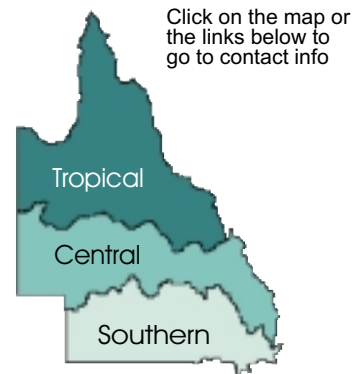
- Avoid cross contamination of fresh or cooked foods by uncooked foods.
- Cook poultry, beef, mince, and eggs thoroughly before eating. Do not eat or drink foods containing raw eggs (eg hollandaise sauce, salad dressings, Caesar salad, tiramisu, home-made icecream, gelati, cocktails & mayonnaise), or raw unpasteurised milk. Wash fruit & vegetables before eating.
- Be particularly careful with foods prepared for infants, the elderly, and the immunocompromised.
- If you are served undercooked meat, poultry, or eggs in a restaurant don't hesitate to send it back to the kitchen for further cooking.
- Wash hands, kitchen work surfaces, and utensils with soap and water immediately after they have been in contact with raw meat or poultry.
- Wash hands with soap and water after handling animals, birds or pets.
- Wash hands with soap and water after changing nappies or going to the toilet.

Information Source:

Chin, J (ed). Control of Communicable Diseases Manual 17th Edition. Washington, DC: American Public Health Association, 2000. 440-444.

Control of Communicable Diseases Protocol Manual (2nd edition). Queensland Health. 2000.

For more information, contact your local public health network



Central Public Health Unit Network servicing Brisbane Northside, Longreach, Redcliffe, Rockhampton, Sunshine Coast, Wide Bay. For contact details go to <http://www.health.qld.gov.au/phs/cphun/>

Southern Public Health Unit Network servicing Brisbane Southside, Darling Downs, Roma, South Coast, South West Queensland, West Moreton. For contact details go to <http://www.health.qld.gov.au/phs/sphun/>

Tropical Public Health Unit Network servicing Cairns, Mackay, Mount Isa and Gulf, Townsville. For contact details go to <http://www.health.qld.gov.au/phs/tphun/>

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For medical advice, contact your doctor, hospital or health clinic.