

Gloucester City Council

Factsheet

SALMONELLA

Salmonella is a bacterium which is one of the commonest causes of food poisoning worldwide. There are over 2,000 different types of salmonella, but with the exception of the few which cause typhoid or paratyphoid fever, the illness they cause is similar.

What is Salmonella?

The incubation period is usually 12 to 72 hours. Symptoms are usually diarrhoea, stomach cramps and sometimes vomiting and fever. The symptoms continue for several days and then, in most people, they cease.

Even when all the symptoms have disappeared the bacteria may remain in the gut and thus in the faeces. When this occurs the people are called carriers and they pass the infection on to others unless their hygiene practices are good. The carrier stage lasts for about **2 to 6 weeks**.

Food poisoning is a notifiable disease and doctors should inform their local CCDC. Investigations are carried out by telephone or a visit by Environmental Health Officers enquiring on risk factors and offering advice on hygiene and the prevention of future infection.

How is salmonella spread?

Food is the commonest source of salmonella for humans. The food may have been contaminated because the source, animal or bird, was infected. Salmonella is common among chickens.

Adequate cooking should eradicate salmonella in food. However salmonella may be spread in a kitchen from contaminated to non-contaminated food if hygiene and catering practices are substandard. Food should be stored in refrigerators to prevent the bacteria multiplying at room temperature. Food may also be contaminated by the hands of infected food handlers if they do not wash them properly after going to the toilet. If food prepared for a party or gathering is contaminated an outbreak of salmonella food poisoning may occur. Individuals nursing or caring for persons with salmonella diarrhoea may contaminate their hands with microscopic amounts of faeces which are carried to their mouths. This is the main reason for secondary cases within a family or in health-care workers.

How can we prevent salmonella?

Salmonella infections usually result from a combination of contaminated foods, poor kitchen hygiene and inadequate cooking. Attention to good kitchen practices including thorough cooking of potentially contaminated foods, especially chicken, should be followed by both the housewife and the chef. The Chief Medical Officer advises against the use of recipes with uncooked or lightly cooked eggs. However, adequate cooking of eggs, until the yolk is set, kills salmonellas. Care must also be taken to ensure that food does not become contaminated after cooking.



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What to do if you have food poisoning

Contact your GP and advise the Environmental Health Department that you have food poisoning.

Wash hands thoroughly

(this applies to the patient and all other members of the household)

Wash well with soap and a nailbrush:

BEFORE preparing or serving food or looking after a baby or toddler;

AFTER using or cleaning the toilet, attending to the patient, changing the baby's nappy or washing soiled clothes and bedding.

Toilet hygiene

Whilst diarrhoea continues great care should be taken to clean the toilet after the patient has used it.

- Use a household disinfectant or bleach.
- Use disposable paper tissues for cleaning the seat, flushing handle, etc.
- Wash hands thoroughly afterwards.

If you have **food poisoning** symptoms (diarrhoea, vomiting or fever) **DO NOT** prepare food for other people to eat whether they are family or visitors.

Return to work/school

Current Department of Health advice is that Patients should remain off work/school until 48 hours after symptoms have ceased.

People who work in food businesses, hospitals, nursing homes or nursery schools should not return to work while symptoms continue. Anyone in these 'high-risk' groups should inform their employer or manager. These people may return to work when motions have been normally formed for at least 48 hours **provided** careful attention is given to hand washing and other aspects of personal hygiene. An Environmental Health Officer will advise on returning to work.

Summary:

Common causes:

- Contaminated food.
- Poor hygiene.
- Inadequate cooking.

Prevention:

- Good personal hygiene practices.
- Good kitchen hygiene practices.
- Adequate cooking of food.