

Salmonella

Information Sheet

What is it?

Salmonella infection (or Salmonellosis) is caused by bacteria that are commonly found in the gut of people, animals such as cattle, sheep, cats and dogs, and birds, especially poultry. It is passed on in the faeces (stool, poo, tūtae) of infected people, animals and birds.

Salmonella infection is a notifiable disease under the Health Act 1956 and is the second most commonly notified disease in New Zealand. People suffering from the illness will be contacted by their local Health Protection Officer to try and establish the source of their illness.

How does a person become infected?

People become infected when they swallow the bacteria. This may be from:

- Swallowing contaminated food. Food can be contaminated by someone who is infected and who does not wash their hands after going to the toilet, or someone who is nursing a person with Salmonellosis and who does not wash their hands afterwards.
- Person-to-person contact, e.g. contact with faeces of an infected person when changing a nappy. Shedding of the organism in faeces may continue for up to three months.
- Eating improperly cooked or stored meat and chicken.
- Handling raw meat and chicken and not washing hands, or items that have come into contact with the meat, properly afterwards.
- Sucking or mouthing contaminated objects. Objects such as toys, can be contaminated by someone who is infected and who does not wash their hands after going to the toilet, or someone who is nursing a person with Salmonellosis and who does not wash their hands afterwards.
- From drinking raw (unpasteurised) milk.
- From drinking untreated water from streams, rivers, shallow bores or roof water that has been contaminated with the faeces of animals or people.
- From not washing hands after touching animals and birds, especially farm animals, pets and chickens, and then touching your mouth.

What are the signs and symptoms of the illness?

The illness usually takes from 12 to 36 hours (sometimes between 6 and 72 hours) for the symptoms to show after you have been infected. The symptoms are the sudden onset of diarrhoea, stomach cramps and fever. Headaches, vomiting and nausea may also occur.

Some people become infected but do not have any symptoms. These people are known as asymptomatic carriers. As they are passing the bacteria in their faeces, they are infectious to others.

Diagnosis can only be confirmed by faecal (stool, poo, tūtae) tests arranged by a doctor.

How bad is it?

The illness is unpleasant but Salmonellosis is not normally a severe illness or long lasting. A person normally recovers in two weeks.

For advice, testing and treatment, you will need to visit your doctor. There is no specific treatment and most people generally recover without treatment. If your case is severe or you have other health problems, your doctor may prescribe antibiotics.

Drink plenty of fluids when you have diarrhoea to prevent dehydration. This is especially important for sick children. Go back to your doctor if your child is not drinking.

While you have symptoms you are infectious to others. As the bacteria may take some time to leave the gut after recovery, you may be infectious for several weeks after the illness has gone.

There is no immunity after the infection so you can contract the illness again.

Will I need time off school, childcare or work?

Your Health Protection Officer can give you instructions on this. Usually you can go back to work if you are free from symptoms.

- People who work in the food industry **must not** return to work until they have been symptom free for 48 hours.
- Early childhood centre workers and some healthcare workers should not return to work until they have been symptom-free for 48 hours.
- Children **must not** return to childcare (kindergartens, childcare centres, play centres, kohanga reo) or school until they have been symptom-free for 48 hours.

As you may be infectious for some time after recovery, it is important that you wash and dry your hands properly after toileting and before preparing/eating food.

How do I avoid the illness?

- Always wash and dry hands thoroughly:
 - after going to the toilet
 - after changing a child's nappy or cleaning up 'accidents'
 - before and after preparing food, especially raw chicken
 - after touching or handling animals or their faeces (stool, poo, tūtae)
 - after nursing a person with Salmonellosis
- Thoroughly cook chicken, meat and eggs.
- Keep raw meat and chicken separate from cooked foods during preparation and storage.
- Wash chopping boards, utensils and equipment after preparing raw meat and chicken.
- Always treat or boil drinking water sourced from streams, rivers, shallow bores or the roof.
- Drink only pasteurised milk.

For further information please contact:



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