

## What is Salmonellosis?

Salmonellosis is an infection caused by a bacterium called *Salmonella*.

## What are the symptoms?

The symptoms usually include diarrhoea, abdominal pain, fever, nausea, vomiting and headaches. Sometimes the diarrhoea can contain blood and mucus.

Symptoms usually start from 12 to 36 hours after a person becomes infected. Most people are sick from 4 to 7 days. Sometimes this can be longer. Dehydration can be a complication in young children and the elderly.

Occasionally the infection gets into the bloodstream or other parts of the body.

## How is salmonellosis spread?

*Salmonella* bacteria are found in the gut of humans and many wild and domestic animals such as mammals, birds and reptiles.

People become unwell after swallowing bacteria. Usually this happens after eating inadequately cooked food, by cross-contamination or person to person spread.

### **Inadequate cooking**

*Salmonella* is often spread when we eat poorly cooked foods. Raw or undercooked eggs, meat and poultry are particularly high risk foods. Thoroughly cooking food will kill *Salmonella*.

### **Cross contamination**

Cross-contamination occurs when bacteria contaminate foods that won't be cooked further. Examples include using contaminated kitchen utensils such as knives or cutting boards, or when food is transferred via the hands of an infected food handler. Fruits and vegetables can easily be contaminated.

## **Person to person spread**

*Salmonella* can also be spread from one person to another via the hands of someone who is infected or through contact with their faeces.

## **How common is salmonellosis?**

There are more than 100 reported cases of salmonellosis in the ACT each year but this can vary. In reality, the actual numbers are probably much higher as not everyone is tested or seeks medical care. Salmonellosis is more common during summer.

## **What treatment is available?**

Most people usually recover with rest and extra fluids. Antibiotics are not usually required but may be recommended by doctors in complicated cases.

## **Who is at risk?**

*Salmonella* can infect anyone. However infants, the elderly and people with weak immune systems are more likely to have severe illness.

## **Should I be at work or school?**

Working in certain occupations when you have a *Salmonella* infection can put other people at risk.

- People working as food handlers should not return to work until 72 hours after their diarrhoea ceases.
- People working in childcare, with the elderly or in health care settings should not return to work until 48 hours after their diarrhoea ceases.
- All other people can return to work or school when their diarrhoea ceases.

## **Children in child care**

Children with *Salmonella* who attend childcare should be excluded until their diarrhoea ceases.

## How is it prevented?

### **Hand washing**

Hand washing is a very effective way of preventing cross-contamination and person to person spread of *Salmonella*. Hands should be washed with soap and running water for between 10 to 15 seconds:

- before preparing food,
- between handling raw and ready to eat food,
- before eating,
- after going to the toilet or changing nappies,
- after handling pets,
- after working in the garden.

### **Safe food handling and storage**

Adopting safe food handling and storage techniques can effectively prevent the spread of *Salmonella*. Remember to follow these food safety rules:

- Keep food preparation areas and utensils clean.
- Use separate cutting boards and utensils when preparing raw foods and ready-to-eat foods.
- Thoroughly cook all raw food, particularly poultry and eggs.
- Avoid using cracked or dirty eggs.
- In the fridge, keep raw foods on a lower shelf than ready-to-eat foods to avoid cross-contamination.
- Keep food below 5°C or above 60°C to prevent bacteria growing.
- Reheat food until the internal temperature is at least 75°C.
- Wash raw fruit and vegetables before eating them.
- Only defrost food in a fridge or by using a microwave.
- Dry dishes with a different dish cloth to that used for wiping hands or kitchen surfaces and wash dish cloths regularly.

### **Pets and animals**

Be aware that pets and animals can carry *Salmonella*. Chickens, tropical fish and reptiles pose a particular risk for young children and infants.

### **Need more information?**

For more information about salmonellosis, contact your doctor or call the Health Protection Service, Communicable Disease Control Information Line during business hours on **(02) 6205 2155**.

**Communicable Disease Control Section at Health Protection Service** is responsible for the investigation and surveillance of notifiable or infectious conditions in the ACT in order to control or prevent their spread in the community. This includes the promotion of immunisation, education and other strategies that help to limit the spread of diseases.

*Salmonellosis is a notifiable disease. Cases notified to ACT Health are investigated by Public Health Officers.*

### **Acknowledgement**

1. Heymann DL, 2008, *Control of Communicable Diseases Manual*, 19th edition.

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