



Get the Facts: Salmonella

Salmonella are bacterium that cause diarrheal illness. They live in the intestinal tracts of humans and animals, including birds, and are usually passed through food that is contaminated with feces. Contaminated foods are often animal products, such as meat, milk or eggs, but all food is at risk for contamination. Every year there are approximately 40,000 cases of salmonellosis reported in the US. In addition, many people who have a mild case don't contact their health care provider, so there are likely to be many more cases that go unreported.

What symptoms does *Salmonella* cause?

Salmonella cause an infection called salmonellosis that usually lasts 4 to 7 days. Most people develop diarrhea, fever and abdominal cramps about 12 to 72 hours after being infected. Most people recover without treatment, but some people may have such severe diarrhea that they have to be hospitalized. In these people the infection may actually spread into their blood stream and other parts of the body. This can be fatal unless it is treated quickly with antibiotics. Seniors, infants and people with impaired immune systems are more likely to develop severe illness.

What should I do if I have the symptoms of salmonellosis?

If you develop symptoms of salmonellosis, including a fever, diarrhea and abdominal cramps, contact your health care provider. Most people recover completely from salmonellosis in 5 to 7 days without treatment. A person who has severe diarrhea or dehydration may be treated with fluids. Antibiotics are usually not necessary unless the infection spreads from the intestines into the blood stream. A small number of people infected with *Salmonella* may develop joint pain, eye irritation and painful urination. This is called Reiter's syndrome. It can last for months or year and can lead to chronic arthritis.

How can I protect myself from salmonellosis?

To protect yourself from salmonellosis, follow these guidelines:

- Use good food handling procedures.
- Sanitize cooking surfaces and utensils before preparing food.
- Store raw meats on the bottom shelf of the refrigerator to prevent juices from dripping.
- Cook poultry, ground meat and eggs thoroughly before eating them.
- Always wash your hands after using the restroom and before handling or eating food.
- Wash your hands after handling animals or cleaning up after them.
- Do not let children under age 5 handle reptiles or turtles.

Learn more by contacting the Christian County Health Department. □