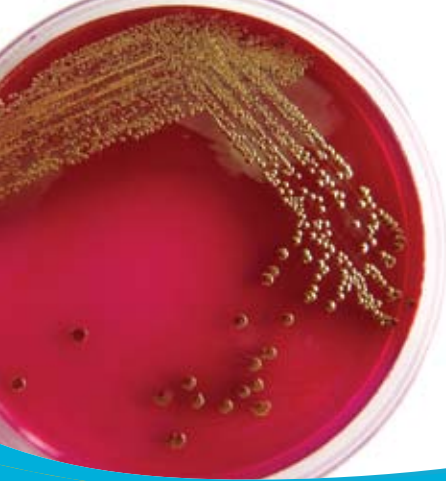


Salmonella

Poisoning



What is salmonella?

Salmonella poisoning is a common form of stomach infection in humans that occurs widely throughout the world. The illness can range from a mild tummy upset through to severe gastroenteritis with complications such as septicaemia.

The symptoms

The symptoms usually appear within 12 to 36 hours. They can include abdominal pain, frequent diarrhoea, chills or fever, headache and vomiting. The illness is generally more severe in the young and the elderly. Dehydration may also be severe, especially among infants.

Although the main stage of illness passes within 3 to 4 days, you may still be infectious for a time after recovery and can pass the illness on if you do not take the necessary precautions. You can also be a carrier. This means you will carry the infection for several weeks to months, but without any symptoms. This is common in young children.

Sources of infection

Salmonella bacteria are naturally present in meat and offal, particularly poultry and pork, but may also be found in raw milk and eggs. Pets such as dogs, cats, turtles and birds may also carry bacteria, as do common household pests (rats, mice, flies and cockroaches).

The infection is most commonly caused by eating food heavily contaminated with the bacteria. Salmonella bacteria are sensitive to heat so thorough cooking will destroy them. The bacteria can still be spread by cross-contamination. This is simply passing bacteria from raw foods such as meat or poultry, to prepared foods, by way of contaminated hands, surfaces, utensils or animals.

The bacteria are carried in the stomach and intestines of humans suffering from the illness. If you do not thoroughly wash your hands after using the toilet, there is a chance you can transfer bacteria from your hands to food you are handling or preparing.

Preventing the spread of salmonella

Good personal hygiene is essential. It is vital to thoroughly wash your hands, using plenty of soap and hot water, after using the toilet, after handling patients, before any food preparation and before eating.

Exclusion from work or school may be required in certain cases, such as where there is potential for the illness to be passed onto other people. Young school children are a high risk when it comes to spreading the bacteria, simply because of their age and lack of knowledge concerning personal hygiene. For this reason, it is important to keep them out of kindy, school and other social activities. Food handlers and people working with the young, elderly or sick may also be excluded from work. In most cases bacteriological clearance is necessary before returning to normal activities. The Environmental Health Officer investigating your case will discuss these with you.

If you are in contact with a patient, you may not necessarily be excluded from work, school or other activities unless symptoms develop. If symptoms do appear it is important you notify the Environmental Health Officer investigating the case.

As salmonella poisoning is commonly picked up and/or spread via food, a good knowledge of safe food handling practices is also important. For additional advice on this, you may wish to read our brochure entitled 'Preparing Safe Food to Eat'.

Definitions

Gastro-enteritis: Severe inflammation of the stomach and intestines.

Septicaemia: Blood poisoning