

Salmonella

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What is *Salmonella*?

Salmonella are germs (bacteria) that cause an infectious disease (called “salmonellosis”) of the bowel in humans and animals. Although the disease is usually limited to the bowel, and most infected people do not have any serious medical complications, the salmonella germ can spread to other systems of the body, such as the blood and bone. This may cause serious complications in infants and in people who are very old or are immunocompromised.

What are the symptoms of salmonellosis?

The most common symptoms are stomach cramps, diarrhea, fever, nausea, and sometimes vomiting. Symptoms most often begin 12 to 72 hours after the germs are swallowed. Symptoms generally last for several days. Some people with salmonellosis become sick enough to require hospitalization.

How is *Salmonella* spread?

The germs must be swallowed to cause disease. Usually this happens when someone eats food that has been contaminated with the germs and has not been properly handled, prepared or cooked. The germs can also spread when people do not wash their hands thoroughly with soap and water after using the toilet, changing diapers, or handling reptiles. People who get the germs on their hands can infect themselves by eating, smoking, or touching their mouths. They can also spread the germs to anyone or anything they touch, especially food, which can then make others sick if not cooked enough to kill the germs.

Salmonella are commonly spread from person to person in daycare centers and other environments where hygiene may be poor.

What types of food are most likely to spread *Salmonella*?

Salmonella germs are common in uncooked food products from animals, such as eggs, egg products, meat, meat products, poultry, unpasteurized milk and other unpasteurized dairy products. However, thorough cooking and processing will kill the germ. Salmonella can be in any type of food if salmonella germs get on the food. A food handler with salmonella may get germs on the food if his or her hands are not washed thoroughly before preparing food.

Can *Salmonella* be spread by animals?

Yes! Salmonella germs have been found in the stool (feces) of both sick and apparently healthy animals (and even healthy people). Most common pets and farm animals, including poultry (chickens, geese, baby chicks, etc.), cows, pigs, dogs, cats and reptiles (such as turtles and iguanas) have been found to carry the germ. *Salmonella* has also been found in some wild animals. Therefore, it is very important to wash your hands well, with plenty of soap and water, after handling these animals.

How is salmonellosis diagnosed?

Your doctor, nurse or health center must send your stool sample to a laboratory. The laboratory then grows germs and tests them to see if any of the germs are salmonella. It takes the lab several days to do this test.



How is the disease treated?

Most people who get salmonellosis do not require treatment other than oral fluids. Some people with severe diarrhea may require intravenous fluids. Antibiotics are not usually given to people unless the infection spreads from their intestines. If you think you might have salmonellosis, you should see your doctor or go to your health center. People with diarrhea or vomiting need extra fluids.

How can you prevent salmonellosis?

The most important things to remember are that *Salmonella* germs can only make you sick if you swallow them, and that they are removed by thoroughly washing your hands with soap and water and by thorough cooking. Be extra careful when using food products from animals, such as eggs, poultry, meats, and dairy products. Follow the tips below. If you make them your habits, you can prevent salmonellosis—as well as other diseases:

- Always wash your hands thoroughly with soap and water before eating or preparing food, after using the toilet, after changing diapers, and after touching your pets or other animals (especially reptiles).
- Make sure to thoroughly cook all food products from animals, especially poultry, ground beef, and eggs. Do not eat raw or cracked eggs, unpasteurized milk, or other unpasteurized dairy products.
- Keep food that will be eaten raw, such as vegetables, from becoming contaminated by animal-derived food products. For example, scrub your hands, all utensils and surfaces that have been in contact with raw poultry before you make a salad. All produce should be thoroughly washed.
- Avoid letting infants or young children come into contact with reptiles, such as turtles or iguanas. If they do, make sure to wash their hands thoroughly with soap and water.
- If you are taking care of someone with diarrhea, scrub your hands with plenty of soap and water after cleaning the bathroom, helping the person use the toilet, or changing diapers, soiled clothes or soiled sheets.

Are there any restrictions for people with salmonellosis?

Yes. Because salmonellosis is a disease that can easily spread to other people, health care providers are required by law to report cases of salmonellosis to the local board of health. In order to protect the public, workers at food-related businesses who have salmonellosis must stay out of work until they don't have diarrhea and laboratory tests on a stool sample show that there are no salmonella germs in their stool. Workers in food-related businesses who have diarrhea and live with someone who has salmonellosis must also show that they have no salmonella in their stool. Food-related businesses include restaurants, sandwich shops, hospital kitchens, supermarkets, and dairy or food-processing plants. This law also includes workers in schools, residential programs, day-care and health care facilities, who feed, give mouth care or dispense medications to clients.

Where can I get more information?

- Your doctor, nurse or health center
- Your local board of health (listed in the phone book under local government)
- The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention at <http://www.cdc.gov/salmonella/>
- The Massachusetts Department of Public Health, Division of Epidemiology and Immunization at (617) 983-6800 or toll-free at 1-888-658-2850.

