

Salmonella Fact Sheet

What is Salmonella?

Salmonella is one of the most commonly reported causes of food poisoning in the UK. There are many different types of Salmonella bacteria and the most commonly occurring one is Salmonella enteritidis which is associated with poultry and eggs.

What are the symptoms?

The most common symptoms are:

- diarrhoea
- stomach cramps
- fever

The illness normally lasts between one and seven days.

Where does Salmonella come from?

You find Salmonella bacteria in the gut of many wild and domestic animals including poultry, cattle, rodents and pets such as cats, dogs, tortoises and terrapins. Humans can also be a source of infection, especially if they have been ill with Salmonella or are recovering from the illness.

How is Salmonella spread?

Salmonella is spread by eating contaminated food that is undercooked or raw such as poultry, eggs, meat and meat products and untreated milk and dairy products. It can also be spread by an infected person, for example, through inadequate hand washing after using the WC and/or during food handling. Contact with animals can also spread Salmonella.

In healthy adults you need high numbers of bacteria to cause illness but vulnerable groups such as the young, the elderly and those in poor health may become ill from taking in low numbers of bacteria.

What is the incubation period?

After swallowing the bacteria, symptoms will usually develop within 12 to 72 hours but the average is 24 hours.

How will I know if I have Salmonella?

If you are ill with diarrhoea, it is recommended you visit your doctor who should arrange a stool specimen from you. Diagnosis is confirmed by growing the Salmonella bacteria in the laboratory from your specimen. This will take a few days.

How can I prevent Salmonella?

- Good food hygiene is essential.
- Cook all food thoroughly, particularly poultry. Normal cooking temperatures readily kill Salmonella.
- Avoid cross contamination from raw to cooked or ready to eat foods.
- Do not use raw eggs in ready to eat dishes such as mayonnaise or mousse.
- Drink and eat only treated milk and dairy products.
- Good personal hygiene is also important in preventing gastro intestinal infection. You must always wash hands thoroughly after using the WC, before preparing food, after handling raw food and refuse, before eating meals and after playing with animals.

How long should I stay off work?

- Usually you can return to work once you are symptom free and feel well enough.
- If you are working with food, or with vulnerable groups of people such as the young, the elderly or those in poor health you must tell your employer about your illness. You should not return to work until you have been symptom free for 48 hours and your stools are back to normal.
- Young children should not attend playgroups, childminders or nursery school until they have been symptom free for 48 hours.

For further information please contact London Borough of Merton, Environmental Health & Trading Standards, Civic Centre, London Road, Morden, Surrey, SM4 5DX. Telephone No: 020 8545 3024.