

Typhoid & Paratyphoid Fever Fact Sheet

What are Typhoid Fever and Paratyphoid Fever?

Typhoid Fever (or 'Typhoid') is an illness caused by the bacteria (germ) *Salmonella typhi*. Another bacterium, *Salmonella paratyphi*, causes a similar but slightly less severe illness, sometimes called Paratyphoid Fever – this is spread and controlled in the same way as Typhoid. Typhoid is common worldwide, but rare in the UK and other developed countries.

What are the symptoms of Typhoid Fever?

Typical features are:

- Fever
- Abdominal pain
- Constipation or diarrhoea
- Headache
- Loss of appetite
- Feeling tired or unwell
- Cough
- Spots on the skin

The illness comes on slowly, and usually lasts 2-3 weeks if not treated. The illness is often severe, and most patients are admitted to hospital. The infection should be treated with antibiotics.

Where does Typhoid Fever come from?

The bacteria live in the blood and gut of humans with the disease; people who are well may also harbour the bacteria ('carriers'). Typhoid is more common in poorer countries; most cases in the UK are associated with travel to these areas.

How do I catch Typhoid Fever?

People who carry the bacteria in their gut (including carriers, who do not feel ill, and may not know they have typhoid) will pass it out in faeces or urine when they go to the toilet and the bacteria may get onto their hands. If they then prepare food the germ can be passed on in food. In addition, if drinking water becomes contaminated by human sewage, the bacteria can be passed on in this way. Food may also be contaminated if human sewage is used as fertiliser, as happens in some countries.

How will I know if I have Typhoid Fever?

If you have typical features of the illness, your doctor may arrange for you to be investigated in hospital. The diagnosis is confirmed by finding the bacteria either in a stool sample or a blood sample.

How can I avoid getting Typhoid Fever?

The main risk is when travelling, especially to Asia, Africa and South America: there are two basic actions you can take:

1. Typhoid fever can be prevented by immunisation. This lasts for 3 years and is given to people who are travelling to countries where typhoid fever is more common - discuss this with your doctor or in a travel clinic. There is no available vaccine to prevent paratyphoid fever.

2. Avoid high-risk food and drinks (this is more important than the vaccine, and will also protect you against other types of food poisoning)
 - Avoid raw vegetables and salads, and fruits that cannot be peeled
 - Avoid drinks with ice or ice cream.
 - Sterilise tap water before drinking (by boiling or using sterilising tablets), or drink carbonated bottled water.
 - Be wary of food from street vendors.
 - Choose food that is thoroughly cooked and piping hot.
 - **BOIL IT, PEEL IT, COOK IT OR OTHERWISE AVOID IT!**

What special care should I take if I have Typhoid Fever?

If you have typhoid fever, you are likely to be treated in hospital, at least for the early part of your illness. You should wash your hands carefully with soap and water and dry them thoroughly each time you go to the toilet; this reduces the chance of you passing the infection on to people around you. You should avoid preparing food for other people while you are ill. If you work with food you will need tests to show that you are no longer carrying the bacteria, before you can return to work.

How long should someone with Typhoid Fever stay away from work, school or nursery?

- Most adults and children over five years who have good standards of personal hygiene can go back to work/school as soon as their illness is better, and they have no diarrhoea.
- People who work with food must stay off work until tests show that bacteria have cleared from their stool specimens in 6 consecutive specimens taken at 2-weekly intervals. They must tell their employer of their illness.
- People working with vulnerable groups e.g. the young, elderly or those in poor health, must stay off work until tests show that the bacteria have cleared from stool specimens in three stool samples taken at weekly intervals. They should tell their employer of their illness.
- Children under five years should stay away from nurseries, playgroups, etc until tests show that the bacteria have cleared from stool specimens in three stool samples taken at weekly intervals.

Who cares if I have Typhoid Fever?

Your doctor and your local Environmental Health Officer (EHO) care.

Your doctor will give you advice about the medical aspects of typhoid fever. You will also be contacted by someone from your local Environmental Health Department, with a series of questions to attempt to find out where you may have picked up the illness. The EHO will advise you about personal hygiene and the need to stay off work etc. They will also arrange for your family or other close contacts to have stool samples tested in the laboratory, to check whether contacts may also be carrying the bacteria.

For further information and advice, please contact: Merton Environmental Health & Trading Standards Section:
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