
Gastroenteritis - salmonellosis

Summary

- Salmonellosis is a form of gastroenteritis (gastro).
 - Eating undercooked animal products, such as poultry and eggs, can cause salmonellosis.
 - Safe food handling and thorough hand washing can help prevent salmonellosis.
-

Salmonellosis is a form of gastroenteritis caused by the germ (bacterium) *Salmonella*.

Salmonellosis can affect anyone, however most cases occur in children and young adults. The severity of symptoms depends on the number of bacteria you ingest, your age and your general health. You may be more prone to salmonellosis if you are elderly, have another medical condition (such as a weakened immune system) or are malnourished.

Symptoms of salmonellosis

Symptoms of salmonellosis usually occur between 6 to 72 hours after you ingest the bacteria. The most common symptoms include:

- diarrhoea, which may contain blood or mucous
- fever
- headache
- stomach cramps
- nausea
- vomiting
- dehydration, especially among infants and the elderly.

In rare cases, septicaemia (blood poisoning) may develop as a complication of salmonellosis.

Causes of salmonellosis

Salmonellosis occurs when *Salmonella* bacteria are taken in by mouth. This may happen in any of the following ways:

- eating undercooked meat, especially poultry, and raw or undercooked eggs
- eating cooked or ready-to-eat food that has been contaminated with *Salmonella* bacteria from raw food, such as raw chicken. This is called cross-contamination and can also happen when food comes into contact with contaminated kitchen surfaces, such as chopping boards and utensils that have been used for raw food
- if people with salmonellosis have *Salmonella* bacteria in their faeces and do not wash their hands properly after going to the toilet, their contaminated hands can spread the bacteria to surfaces and objects that may be touched by others, or food that will be eaten by others. Hands can also become contaminated when changing the nappy of an infected infant
- pets and farm animals who may have *Salmonella* bacteria in their faeces without having any symptoms. People can get salmonellosis from these animals if they do not wash their hands after handling them.

Although the illness usually only lasts for a few days, the bacteria may still be present in your faeces for several weeks. One per cent of adults and five per cent of children may carry the bacteria for more than a year.

Diagnosis of salmonellosis

To find out if you have salmonellosis, the doctor will ask you for a stool (faeces or poo) sample for testing. If the results show that you have salmonellosis, the doctor will be able to provide advice and appropriate treatment (if

required), and will notify the Department of Health and Human Services, Victoria.

If you think you got the infection from contaminated food, contact the health department of your local council. Keep any leftover food that you believe may have caused you to become ill as this will help trace the source of the bacteria. Food-borne outbreaks of salmonellosis do occur, and tracing the source is an important public health responsibility.

Prevention of salmonellosis

To help protect yourself and others from salmonellosis:

- Thoroughly cook food derived from animal products – especially poultry, pork, eggs and meat dishes.
- Don't use dirty or cracked eggs.
- Keep your kitchen clean. Raw foods can contaminate surfaces.
- Store raw and cooked foods separately.
- Wash hands thoroughly with soap and hot running water for 20 seconds before handling food.
- Store high risk foods at or below 5°C or at or above 60°C to prevent growth of bacteria.
- Do not handle cooked foods with the same utensils used for raw foods, unless they have been thoroughly washed between use.

To prevent the spread of infection:

- Keep children home from school, child care or kindergarten until symptoms have stopped.
- Food handlers, childcare workers and healthcare workers must not work until symptoms have stopped.
- Clean bathrooms and other surfaces regularly.

Where to get help

- Your **GP (doctor)**
- **NURSE-ON-CALL** Tel. **1300 606 024** – for expert health information and advice (24 hours, 7 days)
- Your local council health department
- **Communicable Disease Epidemiology and Surveillance Unit, Department of Health and Human Services**, Victorian Government Tel. **1300 651 160**

This page has been produced in consultation with and approved by:

Department of Health and Human Services - RHP&R - Health Protection - Communicable Disease Prevention and Control Unit

Content on this website is provided for information purposes only. Information about a therapy, service, product or treatment does not in any way endorse or support such therapy, service, product or treatment and is not intended to replace advice from your doctor or other registered health professional. The information and materials contained on this website are not intended to constitute a comprehensive guide concerning all aspects of the therapy, product or treatment described on the website. All users are urged to always seek advice from a registered health care professional for diagnosis and answers to their medical questions and to ascertain whether the particular therapy, service, product or treatment described on the website is suitable in their circumstances. The State of Victoria and the Department of Health & Human Services shall not bear any liability for reliance by any user on the materials contained on this website.

For the latest updates and more information, visit www.betterhealth.vic.gov.au

Copyright © 1999/2019 State of Victoria. Reproduced from the Better Health Channel (www.betterhealth.vic.gov.au) at no cost with permission of the Victorian Minister for Health. Unauthorised reproduction and other uses comprised in the copyright are prohibited without permission.