

West Virginia Department of Health and Human Resources Information for the Public on Salmonellosis

What is *Salmonella*?

Salmonella is a bacteria that is found in the intestines of many animals, including birds, mammals and reptiles. Raw eggs, poultry, or meats can be contaminated with *Salmonella*. There are many types of *Salmonella*, most of which can infect humans. Illness from *Salmonella* can vary from mild diarrhea to serious disease, such as typhoid fever.

What are the symptoms of *Salmonella* infection?

For most people, *Salmonella* causes diarrhea, stomach cramps, and fever. Blood or mucous may appear in the stool. The diarrhea and other symptoms usually begin 6-72 hours after exposure and may last 48-72 hours, but the person may carry *Salmonella* in the intestines for weeks or months and be able to infect others.

Rarely, *Salmonella* can get into the blood and infect organs such as the heart, lungs, and bones. Death from *Salmonella* is rare. Children under age five, the elderly, and people with compromised immune systems, such as those with AIDS, are at the greatest risk for severe disease.

How is *Salmonella* spread?

Because *Salmonella* is most commonly found in animals, people may get infected by eating foods contaminated with the bacteria (usually meats, poultry, and eggs). *Salmonella* is passed in the stool, and people may be infected by accidentally consuming feces from an infected animal or other human. Young children may be infected after handling pets such as chicks, ducklings, and especially reptiles, such as iguanas and turtles.

How is *Salmonella* treated?

In most cases, the only treatment is to drink lots of fluids to prevent dehydration. A doctor may give antibiotics to those at risk for severe complications.

How can *Salmonella* be prevented?

- Wash hands well after using the toilet, cleaning the toilet, after changing diapers, and after handling soiled towels or linens.
- Wash hands well before, during, and after fixing food.
- Thoroughly cook all foods from animal sources, especially chicken, beef, pork, meat dishes, and eggs.
- After preparing raw meat, thoroughly wash and rinse all utensils, bowls, and counters.
- Use a separate cutting board to prepare raw meats. Use a clean plate for cooked meat. Never return cooked meat to the same plate used for raw meat.

- Marinade or BBQ sauce used on raw meat should not be used on cooked meat.
- Do not eat raw or partially cooked eggs, as in eggnog or homemade ice cream. Use pasteurized egg products from the grocery store for these purposes.
- Cook eggs until the yolks are hard. “Sunny-side up” and “over easy” eggs may be a source of *Salmonella* infection.
- Thoroughly rinse or wash fruits and vegetables that will be eaten raw.
- Avoid the use of untreated manure as a fertilizer for fruits and vegetables.
- Drink only pasteurized milk and milk products.
- Keep food at proper refrigeration temperatures.
- Wash hands after handling pets and pet cages.
- Keep pets out of food-preparation areas.
- Do not clean pet or reptile cages in the kitchen sink or in the bathtub.
- Iguanas or other reptiles should not be allowed to roam the house.
- Do not let children handle reptiles without supervision.
- Reptiles should not be kept in child care centers.
- Households with children under age five, pregnant women, and persons with depressed immune systems, such as AIDS, should not have reptiles.
- If you travel to developing countries, know the rules for safe food and water (“boil it, cook it, peel it, or forget it”), and ask your travel clinic about the typhoid vaccine.