

Food Poisoning Information

Salmonella

Often present in uncooked meat, Salmonella is a common cause of food poisoning.

What is it?

Found in animals and birds, especially chickens, Salmonella is a type of illness-causing bacteria. It is also found in humans.

Salmonellosis

Salmonellosis is a type of gastroenteritis caused by the Salmonella bacteria. The severity of symptoms can vary but may be more severe in the elderly, infants and people with low immune levels. Salmonellosis is caused by consuming food or water contaminated by Salmonella. Common causes are:

- **Inadequate cooking** – Salmonella are often present in raw meat, especially poultry. If meat is not adequately cooked, the bacteria may survive the cooking process. Consumption of meat contaminated by the Salmonella bacteria can lead to Salmonellosis. Eggs can also be contaminated
- **Cross contamination** – Salmonella can spread when raw foods contaminated with the bacteria come into contact with cooked or ready-to-eat food. To avoid cross contamination, all raw foods should be handled and stored separately from cooked or ready-to-eat foods
- **Person to person** – People suffering from Salmonellosis have Salmonella bacteria in their faeces. Inadequate hand washing after going to the toilet can spread the bacteria to all surfaces (including food) touched by those hands. Hands may also become contaminated when changing the nappy of a child infected with Salmonella. People and animals can carry the salmonella bacteria without having any symptoms.

The Symptoms

Common symptoms include fever, headache, aching limbs, diarrhoea and vomiting. Dehydration may also occur, especially in infants and the elderly. The symptoms first appear 12 to 36 hours after eating contaminated food and can last up to 7 days. The Salmonella bacteria may remain in the faeces for several weeks longer. If you have the symptoms of Salmonellosis, report them to your doctor immediately.

Stopping the spread of Salmonellosis

Food handlers, childcare and health care workers with Salmonellosis must not be allowed to work, nor should children attend school, until all the symptoms have ceased.

Avoiding Salmonellosis

To reduce the risk of getting Salmonellosis:

1. Wash hands with soap and warm running water for at least ten seconds:
 - Before preparing food or eating;
 - Between handling raw and ready to eat foods;
 - After going to the toilet, changing a nappy, smoking, using a tissue or handkerchief, working in the garden or playing with pets.

Food handlers should use disposable paper towels only to dry their hands.

2. Practice safe food storage and handling
 - Do not use the same utensils (tongs, knives, cutting boards, etc) to handle raw and cooked foods. Thoroughly wash utensils between uses;
 - Clean all bench tops, cutting boards and utensils with detergent and follow up with a sanitiser (which kills bacteria) such as hot water (above 77°C) or a chemical sanitiser;
 - Defrost food using the refrigerator or microwave only;
 - Thoroughly cook all raw foods, especially poultry, eggs and meat products;
 - Place food that is not to be eaten immediately in the refrigerator within one hour of cooking;
 - Store raw foods on the lower shelves, with cooked or ready to eat food on the higher shelves in the refrigerator to prevent cross contamination;
 - Ensure hot foods are kept above 60°C and cold foods below 5°C;
 - Thoroughly wash raw vegetable before eating;
 - Thoroughly reheat leftovers to at least 75°C;
 - Protect food and utensils from insects, rodents and other animals
3. Practice regular household cleaning
 - Bathrooms and toilets should be regularly cleaned, especially toilet seats, handles, taps and nappy change tables;
 - Sandpits can become contaminated with animal faeces and urine. Rake the sand frequently and dispose of any faeces. Cover when not in use.
4. Avoid water from untreated sources
 - Water that comes directly from rivers and lakes may be contaminated with animal or human faeces. Always boil the water before drinking it.
5. Food handlers are required to report to their supervisor if they have symptoms, or know that they are a carrier of a food borne illness. Such persons are obliged not to handle food until they are recovered or, if a carrier, free of the organism of concern.