

What is Salmonella?

Salmonella is a common bacterial infection of the gut. Several hundred people develop this disease in Iowa each year, mostly in the summer.

Who gets Salmonella?

Anyone, but it occurs most often in infants and children.

How are Salmonella bacteria spread?

Usually transmitted to humans by eating foods contaminated with animal feces. Contaminated foods are often of animal origin, such as beef, poultry, milk, or eggs, but all foods, including vegetables, may become contaminated. Food may also become contaminated by the unwashed hands of an infected food handler.

Salmonella may also be found in the feces of some pets, especially those with diarrhea, and people can become infected if they do not wash their hands after contact with these feces. Reptiles are particularly likely to harbor Salmonella and people should always wash their hands immediately after handling a reptile, even if the reptile is healthy. Adults should also be careful that children wash their hands after handling a reptile. Homes with infants or immunocompromised persons should not have reptiles (turtles, iguanas, other lizards, and snakes) as pets.

What are the symptoms of Salmonella infection?

People infected with Salmonella may have mild or severe diarrhea, fever, and sometimes vomiting. Blood infections can be very serious, especially in the very young or very old. Typhoid fever is the most severe type of Salmonella infection.

How soon after infection with Salmonella do symptoms appear?

Diarrhea and fever usually occur 12 - 36 hours after infection, with a range of 6 – 72 hours. Longer incubation periods up to 16 days have been seen when exposed to low doses of salmonella.

Where are Salmonella found?

Salmonella are found everywhere, but most often in raw meats, uncooked eggs, contaminated water, "raw" (unpasteurized) milk and cheese. Pet turtles, iguanas, snakes, other reptiles, baby chickens, ducks, dogs, and cats can also carry Salmonella.

How long can an infected person carry Salmonella?

For several days and possibly many months. Infants and people treated with antibiotics may carry the bacteria longer than others.

Do infected people need to be excluded from work or school?

Since Salmonella is found in the feces (stool), people with diarrhea (especially children in child care centers or people who handle food) should not go to school or work. Most infected people may return to work or school when their diarrhea stops if they carefully wash their hands after using the toilet and before handling food.

What is the treatment for Salmonella?

Most people will recover without treatment. Persons with severe diarrhea, especially small children and elderly people, should see a doctor.

How can Salmonella be prevented?

1. Always refrigerate meats.
2. Always cook meats completely. Never eat raw meat.
3. Always cook eggs or food containing raw eggs.
4. Avoid unpasteurized milk or foods made with unpasteurized milk.

5. Wash hands carefully before and after preparing food.
6. Wash counter tops, cuttings boards and any utensil after use on raw meat or eggs.
7. Always wash hands carefully with soap and warm water after using the toilet or handling dirty diapers.
8. Make sure that infant's and children's hands are washed after diaper changing.
9. Make sure everyone washes their hands with soap and warm water after handling pets, especially reptiles.
10. If making foods, such as eggnog, homemade ice cream or sauces, that include raw eggs, use pasteurized eggs. These can be found at grocery stores, in the refrigerated section, as liquid or shell eggs.