

# PUBLIC HEALTH FACT SHEET

## Salmonella



### Burlington County Health Department

Raphael Meadow Health Center  
15 Pioneer Boulevard  
P.O. Box 6000  
Westampton, N.J. 08060  
Phone: 609-265-5548 Fax: 609-265-3152



**Public Health**  
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Burlington County Health Department  
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### What is salmonella?

Salmonella is a bacteria that infects the intestinal tract. It is estimated that each year salmonella illness infects 1.2 million people and kills about 450. Infections are more common in the winter and summer.

### What are the symptoms?

The most common symptoms are stomach cramps, diarrhea, fever, nausea, vomiting, chills, and sometimes blood in the stool. Symptoms can take up to three days to show up, but most often begin 12 to 36 hours after the germs are swallowed. Symptoms generally last for 4 to 7 days. Some infected people may not have any symptoms.

### How is salmonella spread?

Salmonella bacteria live in the intestines of people and animals. To make someone sick, they must be swallowed. This usually happens when someone eats food that has been contaminated with feces. Commonly infected foods include:

- **Raw meat, poultry, and seafood.** Feces may get onto raw meat and poultry during the butchering process. Seafood may be contaminated if harvested from contaminated water.
- **Raw eggs.** Salmonella can sometimes get into an egg before the shell is formed if the chicken producing the egg is unknowingly infected.
- **Fruits and vegetables.** Some fresh produce, especially imported from other counties, can become tainted in the field, or washed during processing with contaminated water. Contamination can also occur in the kitchen, when juices from raw meat and poultry come into contact with uncooked foods, such as salads.
- **Raw or unpasteurized milk and cheese.** Milk and cheese that are not pasteurized (the process of partially cooking a food item to kill germs) can carry salmonella. Most dairy products sold in stores come pre-pasteurized so normally this is not a major cause of infection.

Many foods become contaminated when prepared by people who don't wash their hands thoroughly after using the toilet or changing a diaper. Infection also can occur if you touch something that is contaminated, including pets, especially birds and reptiles, then put your fingers in your mouth.

### What animals spread Salmonella?

Salmonella germs have been found in the feces of both sick and seemingly healthy animals (and even seemingly healthy people). Most common pets and farm animals, including poultry (chickens, geese, etc.), cows, pigs, dogs, cats and reptiles (such as turtles and iguanas) have been found to carry the germ. Salmonella has also been found in some wild animals. Therefore, it is very important to wash your hands well, with plenty of soap and water, after handling these animals.

## How can you know for sure if you have salmonellosis?

Salmonella infection can be detected by testing a sample of your stool. However, most people recover from their symptoms by the time the test results return. If your doctor suspects that you have a salmonella infection in your bloodstream, he or she may suggest testing a sample of your blood for the bacteria.

## How is the disease treated?

Usually, people who are otherwise healthy will get over the illness without having to be clinically treated. Antibiotics are used to treat salmonellosis only in people whose bodies may not be able to fight off the infection on their own, such as the very young, very old, or immunocompromised. If otherwise healthy people take antibiotics to fight salmonella, the germs might stay in the body longer than if they had not taken antibiotics. People with diarrhea or vomiting need extra fluids. Taking anti-diarrheal medicines can help relieve stomach cramping, but they may also extend the diarrhea associated with salmonella infection.

## How can you prevent salmonellosis?

The most important things to remember are that the bacteria can only make you sick if you swallow them, and that the germs are killed by thoroughly washing your hands with soap and water and by thorough cooking. Be extra careful when using food products from animals, such as eggs, poultry, meats, and dairy products.

Follow the tips below; if you make them your habits, you can prevent salmonella—as well as other diseases:

- **Wash your hands.** Use warm water and soap and scrub for 30 seconds. Wash hands after you use the toilet, change a diaper, handle raw meat or poultry, clean up pet feces, or touch reptiles or birds.
- **Keep food separate.** To prevent cross-contamination, store raw meat away from other foods in the refrigerator, have two cutting boards if possible- one for raw meat and the other for produce, never place cook foods on an unwashed plate that previously help raw meat.
- **Avoid eating raw eggs.** Cookie dough, homemade ice cream, and eggnog all contain raw eggs. If you must consume raw eggs, make sure they are pasteurized. Avoid drinking unpasteurized milk and eating unpasteurized cheese as well. Most store-bought milk and cheese is pasteurized unless otherwise written on the packaging.

## Are there any restrictions for people with salmonellosis?

Yes. Because salmonellosis is a disease that can easily spread to other people, health care providers are required by law to report cases of salmonellosis to the local board of health. To protect the public, workers who handle food who have salmonella must stay out of work until they don't have diarrhea and 2 lab tests on stool samples show that there are no salmonella germs. Workers in food-related businesses who have diarrhea and live with someone who has salmonellosis must also show that they have no salmonella in their stool. Food-related businesses include restaurants, sandwich shops, hospital kitchens, supermarkets, dairy, or food-processing plants. This law also includes workers in schools, residential programs, and day-care and health care facilities who feed, give mouth care, or dispense medications to clients. Children with diarrhea must be excluded from day-care or school until symptoms are gone and they get a note from their doctor.

## Where can I get more information?

- Your doctor, nurse, or clinic
- The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) website at: <http://www.cdc.gov/>
- The Mayo Clinic website at [www.mayoclinic.org](http://www.mayoclinic.org)
- The Burlington County Health Department at (609) 265-5548
- The New Jersey Department of Health website at [www.nj.gov/health](http://www.nj.gov/health)