

# Salmonella

## Fact sheet

Salmonellosis is a disease caused by the bacteria called Salmonella. In Australia, most Salmonella infections occur after eating contaminated food or sometimes after contact with another person with the infection. Handling food safely, including thorough cooking of meat, poultry and eggs, and good hand hygiene can prevent infection.

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### What is Salmonellosis?

Salmonellosis (or Salmonella) is a disease caused by infection with bacteria called Salmonella. In Australia, most Salmonella infections occur after eating contaminated food or sometimes after contact with another person with the infection.

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### What are the symptoms of Salmonella?

Symptoms include:

- headache
- fever
- stomach cramps
- diarrhoea
- nausea
- vomiting

Symptoms usually start 6-72 hours after exposure to the bacteria and usually last for 4-7 days. Symptoms can sometimes last a lot longer.

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### How is Salmonella spread?

Salmonella is usually spread to humans by eating under-cooked food made from infected animals (for example undercooked meat, poultry and foods from animals such as eggs).

Salmonella can also be spread by:

- 1) Cross contamination –this is when the salmonella from contaminated food is spread to other

food. For example if a knife is used to cut food contaminated with salmonella and is then used to cut food which will not be cooked further, the salmonella will grow in the new food.

- 2) Person to person – if hands are not washed properly, particularly when preparing food. It can also be spread from animals to humans.

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## Who is at risk of Salmonella?

Anyone can get Salmonella. Infants, the elderly, and people with poor immune systems are more likely to have a severe illness.

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## How is Salmonella prevented?

### Cooking

Cooking food well kills Salmonella. Avoid raw or undercooked meat, poultry, or eggs. Poultry and meat - such as hamburgers, sausages, and rolled roasts - should be cooked until you can see no pink in the middle.

### Hand washing

Always wash your hands thoroughly with soap and water for at least 20 seconds after going to the toilet, changing nappies, touching animals, before and after handling food and before eating. It is important to particularly clean under the fingernails and between fingers.

Infected food handlers can spread the bacteria easily. They should not handle or serve food until 48 hours after the diarrhoea has stopped.

### Temperature control

Not storing food properly can allow the bacteria to grow.

To prevent contamination:

- keep refrigerated foods at less than five degrees Celsius
- keep hot foods above 60 degrees Celsius
- foods should be quickly reheated until all parts of the food are steaming hot
- thaw frozen foods in a fridge or microwave.

The longer you leave food at room temperature the more Salmonella can multiply.

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## Food handling and contamination

To prevent the contamination of food:

- store raw foods (such as meat) in sealed containers in the bottom of the fridge or freezer to stop any fluid dripping or spilling onto other ready to eat food. Cover all foods in the refrigerator and freezer to protect them from contamination
- use different chopping boards, trays, utensils and plates when preparing raw foods and ready to eat food. If you have only one chopping board wash it well in hot soapy water before reuse
- thoroughly wash all dirt off any raw vegetables and fruits before preparing and eating them

- dry dishes with a different cloth to that used for wiping hands or bench tops and wash dish cloths regularly.

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## How is Salmonella diagnosed?

A doctor will tell you if you have Salmonella by running a test on a faeces (poo) sample.

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## How is Salmonella treated?

Most people recover by having lots of rest and drinking plenty of fluids such as water or oral hydration drinks (from your pharmacist). Most people recover within a week.

You should contact your doctor if:

- symptoms last longer than a few days
- diarrhea is severe or bloody
- you are at risk for severe Salmonella (young children, older people, and people with poor immune systems)
- you are worried.

Most people do not need antibiotics. Antibiotics may be prescribed for young children or older people. Some people may require hospitalisation.

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## What is the public health response to Salmonella?

Laboratories are required to notify cases of Salmonella infections to the local Public Health Unit. The public health units investigate clusters of cases to try and identify common links. Where a common food is found the NSW Food Authority will undertake a further environmental investigation and put in control measures. Statistics on cases are used to help develop prevention strategies.

The NSW Food Authority is responsible for a range of food safety strategies to prevent salmonellosis and other food borne infections.

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## For more information

If you need non-urgent medical advice call healthdirect for free (24 hours) on 1800 022 222 or speak to your local pharmacist.

If you need to contact your local Public Health Unit, call 1300 066 055 or visit the NSW Health website.