



Whatcom County Health Department

FACT SHEET: SALMONELLOSIS

What is salmonellosis?

Salmonellosis is a common bacterial infection caused by any of more than 2,000 strains of *Salmonella*. These bacteria infect the intestinal tract and occasionally the blood. Annually, there are 600 to 800 cases reported in Washington state.

How does a person get salmonellosis?

- People are most often infected by eating or drinking contaminated food or water or by contact with infected people or animals.
- Salmonellosis is a food-borne illness acquired from contaminated raw poultry, eggs, or unpasteurized milk, and cheese products, produce, cereal, candy, beverages, as well as contact with reptiles, cattle, poultry, and other animals.

Who gets salmonellosis?

- Anyone who is exposed to *Salmonella* bacteria can get salmonellosis.
- Children, the elderly, and people with weakened immune systems are at a greater risk of illness.

What are the symptoms ?

- Symptoms can include severe diarrhea, bloody diarrhea, fever, chills, abdominal discomfort, and occasionally vomiting.
- The symptoms generally appear one to three days after exposure.
- Serious bloodstream infections can occur, particularly in the very young or elderly.

When is an infected person contagious?

- The infectious period can vary from several days to many months.
- Those who have been treated with oral antibiotics tend to carry the bacteria longer than others.
- Infected food handlers, health care workers, and individuals associated with daycare must obtain the approval of their local health department before returning to work or daycare.

What is the treatment for salmonellosis?

- Most people recover on their own without medication.
- Antibiotics and antidiarrheal drugs are generally not recommended.
- Some people require intravenous fluids to prevent dehydration.

How can we prevent salmonellosis?

- Wash your hands with soap and warm water before and after handling foods, after using the bathroom or changing a baby's diaper, and after contact with animals.
- Make sure children, particularly those who handle pets, wash their hands properly.
- Do not allow reptiles in areas where you feed or bathe small children.
- Wrap fresh meat and poultry in plastic bags at the market to prevent blood from dripping on other foods.
- Refrigerate foods promptly.
- Defrost meat and poultry in the refrigerator; minimize holding foods at room temperature.
- Wash cutting boards and counters used for meat or poultry preparation immediately after use to avoid cross contaminating other foods.
- Avoid eating raw or undercooked meat, poultry, and eggs.
- Never prepare food for other people if you have diarrhea.
- Do not swim in pools or lakes if you have diarrhea.

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For more information, or to report a salmonellosis case, call the Whatcom County Health Department at (360) 676-6724.