



Live Well, Work Well

Lab test results indicating a positive salmonella infection are reported to and tracked by local public health departments.

PUBLIC HEALTH: SALMONELLA

Every year, approximately 1.2 million cases of salmonella and 450 deaths are reported in the United States. Because many cases go undiagnosed, the actual number of infections may be 20 or more times greater than this.

Causes

Salmonella is a type of bacteria that lives in the intestinal tracts of humans and other animals, including birds. You can become infected by:

- Eating foods contaminated with animal feces. Contaminated foods often look and smell normal.
- Eating foods of animal origin such as beef, poultry, milk, or eggs. These are the most common sources of salmonella, but all foods, including vegetables, can become contaminated.
- Eating food contaminated during the harvesting, handling, or serving process. This can occur when food handlers fail to properly wash their hands using soap and water after using the bathroom.
- Failing to wash your hands after handling pet feces. Reptiles and animals with diarrhea are particularly likely to harbor the bacteria.

Symptoms

If you experience the following symptoms, seek medical attention for possible salmonella infection:

- Diarrhea, fever, and abdominal cramps
- Symptoms beginning 12 to 72 hours after suspected ingestion
- Symptoms lasting 4 to 7 days

Diagnosis

Laboratory tests are needed to determine if a salmonella infection is the cause of your symptoms. A stool sample is collected and tested for the presence and specific type of salmonella bacteria in your system.

Treatment

If salmonella is detected, further testing can determine its specific type, and how to treat it. Most people recover without treatment, but for some, diarrhea can become severe enough that hospitalization is needed. In these cases, the salmonella infection may spread from the intestines to the blood stream, and then to other parts of the body where they become fatal unless treated promptly with antibiotics.

The elderly, infants, and those with compromised immune systems are more likely to experience severe complications. If not effectively treated, salmonella infections can lead to the development of joint pain, eye irritation, urinary pain, and arthritis—called Reiter's Syndrome—which may last for several months or years.

Prevention

There is no vaccine for a salmonella infection. Avoiding possible sources of contamination is your best defense:

- Do not eat raw or undercooked eggs, poultry, or meat.
- Wash all produce thoroughly before consuming.
- Avoid cross-contamination of foods. Keep uncooked meats separate from produce, cooked foods, and ready-to-eat foods.
- Wash hands, cutting boards, counters, knives, and other utensils thoroughly after handling uncooked foods.
- Always wash hands before handling food and between handling different food items.
- Always wash hands following contact with animal feces.
- Never prepare food or pour water for others when you have salmonella before being clinically shown to no longer be carrying the bacteria.

