



## Shire of Denmark

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# Salmonella



### What is *Salmonella*?

*Salmonella* is a type of bacteria, which is harmful to man and gives rise to symptoms such as:

#### Diarrhoea

#### Nausea and vomiting

#### Abdominal pain and cramps

#### Fever and chills

These symptoms are commonly referred to as gastroenteritis. There is usually a 12 to 36 hour delay after eating infected food before symptoms develop and the illness usually lasts from 4 to 7 days. The elderly, infants and those with impaired immune systems are more likely to have a more severe illness.

### How do people catch *Salmonella*?

*Salmonella* live in the intestinal tracts of humans and other animals, including pets, birds, reptiles and insects. *Salmonella* is usually transmitted to humans by eating foods contaminated with the bacteria. Contaminated foods usually look and smell normal.

Contaminated foods are often of animal origin such as beef, poultry, milk and eggs. However any food including vegetables may become contaminated. Many raw foods of animal origin are frequently contaminated, but fortunately, thorough cooking kills *Salmonella*.

Some people may become infected if they do not wash their hands after contact with their pet faeces.

The unwashed hands of an infected food handler, who fails to wash his or her hands after using the toilet, may also contaminate food.

### How can *Salmonella* be diagnosed?

Many different kinds of illnesses can cause diarrhoea, fever or abdominal cramps. Determining that *Salmonella* is the cause of the illness depends on laboratory tests. These tests can be organised by your doctor or local Environmental Health Officer.

### How can *Salmonella* infections be treated?

Often it is better for the body to fight food poisoning itself unless symptoms are severe and continuous. Usually *Salmonella* infections last in 4-7 days, although this will vary depending on the individual.

Most people that contract *Salmonella* do not require treatment unless they become dehydrated or the infection spread from the intestines. It is important for you to drink plenty of water during this time.

*Salmonella* bacteria can remain in the body after symptoms of the disease have ceased. There is always the possibility that the infection could be passed to other people. Food handlers and children who attend day care centres must remain home while they still show clinical symptoms and may return to work/day care only if faecal specimens prove negative for *Salmonella*.

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The Environmental Health Officer may ask the patient to provide a follow-up specimen until one proves to be *Salmonella* negative.

### **What can a person do to prevent *Salmonella*?**

The cross-contamination of foods should be avoided. Uncooked meats should be kept separate from produce, cooked foods, and ready-to-eat foods. Hands, cutting boards, counters, knives, and other utensils should be washed thoroughly after handling uncooked foods. Hands should be washed before handling any food, and between handling different food items.

Poultry and prepared meat, including sausages and hamburgers, should be very well cooked and you should not consume unpasteurised milk or dairy products or raw eggs.

People who have *Salmonella* should not prepare food or pour water for others until tests confirm that they are no longer carrying the *Salmonella* bacteria. People should wash their hands after contact with pets or pets faeces.

### **What can be done to prevent *Salmonella*?**

It is important for your local Environmental Health Officer at the Shire of Denmark to know about cases of *Salmonella*. If many cases occur at the same time, it may mean that a restaurant, food or water supply has a problem that requires investigation by an Environmental Health Officer.

Better education of food industry workers in food safety and restaurant inspection procedures will also reduce cross-contamination and other food handling errors that can lead to outbreaks.

