



Salmonella food poisoning



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What is food poisoning?

Food poisoning occurs from eating food contaminated with sufficiently high numbers of bacteria (germs). It is most likely to occur in the summer when warm weather encourages the growth of bacteria in contaminated food, or at Christmas, when more poultry is eaten.

What is *Salmonella*?

Salmonella is a type of food poisoning and is one of the most common forms in the UK. However, there are many forms of *Salmonella*, but *Salmonella enteritidis* (phage type IV) is the most common type in causing food poisoning.

What food is affected?

Salmonella bacteria can be found naturally in a wide variety of birds and animals, but the most important source of infection for man is poultry. Therefore, all raw meats should be treated as contaminated.

Salmonella may be brought into the kitchen or in foods of animal origin, e.g. poultry, meat, unpasteurised milk, duck and hen eggs.

Insects, birds, vermin and domestic pets can spread *salmonella* into food if they are allowed to be present in the kitchen.

People working in the kitchen are sometimes, unknowingly, carrying *salmonella* in their intestines and may contaminate food if they don't wash their hands after a visit to the toilet.

How to prevent *salmonella* food poisoning

Salmonella bacteria are readily killed by heat.

Foods causing this type of food poisoning have either been cooked inadequately or have been contaminated after cooking, e.g. poultry which has not been properly defrosted, cold meats which have been cross-contaminated.

You can prevent *Salmonella* food poisoning by:-

- (a) Thawing frozen food completely before cooking. Allow 24 hours to thaw a 3lb (1.5kg) chicken in the refrigerator.
- (b) Cooking food thoroughly, making sure the temperature at the centre of the food is high enough to kill bacteria, i.e. 70°C.
- (c) Using different surfaces and equipment, e.g. chopping boards, knives, etc. for preparing raw and cooked food.
- (d) Cleaning all equipment thoroughly after each use.

- (e) Storing raw and cooked foods (particularly meat) separately. Always store cooked food above raw food within the refrigerator, ensuring all food is kept covered.
- (f) Washing hands after handling raw meat.
- (g) Keeping food as cold as possible to prevent multiplication of Salmonella, i.e. below 5°C.

Note: Eggs should be cooked until the yolk and white are solid to ensure destruction of the salmonella bacteria.

What are the symptoms of *Salmonella* food poisoning?

The symptoms are:-

Fever, headache, stomach pains and diarrhoea, vomiting is less frequent.

The incubation period (i.e. the time lapse before symptoms start) is 12-36 hours.

The duration of the illness is normally between 1-8 days.

However, some people can carry the *Salmonella* bacteria for several weeks without showing symptoms.

What to do if someone has *Salmonella* food poisoning

During the diarrhoeal phase, personal hygiene should be scrupulous and food-handling should be avoided as it is during this time that it is possible to pass the infection on to another person.

You should also inform your doctor, who will in turn inform the Environmental Health Department.

An Officer from the Environmental Health Services will then visit you to give advice and to determine the possible sources of the infection.

Who is more prone to food poisoning?

The very young and the elderly are generally more vulnerable than healthy adults. However, anyone whose health is in some way impaired or whose immune system is low will also be prone to food poisoning contamination.

Epsom and Ewell Environmental Health Services' advice, with regard to vulnerable people, is not to eat uncooked or lightly cooked eggs.