

## SALMONELLOSIS Q&A

### ***What is salmonellosis?***

Salmonellosis is a bacterial infection that generally affects the intestinal tract and occasionally the bloodstream. It is one of the more common causes of gastroenteritis with approximately 1500 cases occurring in Georgia each year. Most cases occur in the summer and early fall months and are seen as single cases, clusters, or outbreaks.

### ***Who gets salmonellosis?***

Any person can get salmonellosis, but symptoms are most severe in the elderly, infants, and the immunocompromised.

### ***How are Salmonella bacteria spread?***

*Salmonella* usually are spread by eating foods or drinking water contaminated by feces or through contact with infected people or animals. An infected person who handles food may pass the *Salmonella* on to others by not washing his or her hands with soap and water after using the bathroom. Reptiles and birds commonly harbor *Salmonella*.

### ***What are the symptoms of salmonellosis?***

People infected with *Salmonella* may experience mild or severe diarrhea, abdominal pain, nausea, vomiting, fever and headache. Some people may suffer severe diarrhea and need to be hospitalized. The infection may spread from the intestines to the blood stream, and then to other body sites. *Salmonellosis* in these cases can cause death unless the person is treated with antibiotics. The elderly, infants, and people with impaired immune systems are more likely to have a severe illness.

### ***How soon after exposure do symptoms appear?***

The symptoms generally appear one to three days after exposure but can be delayed as long as a week.

### ***Where are Salmonella bacteria found?***

*Salmonella* are widely distributed in our food chain and environment. The organisms often contaminate raw meats, eggs, unpasteurized milk and cheese products. Other sources of exposure may include

contact with infected pet turtles, iguanas, other reptiles, pet chicks, dogs and cats.

### ***How long can an infected person carry Salmonella bacteria?***

The carrier state varies from several days to many months. Infants and people who have been treated with oral antibiotics tend to carry the bacteria longer than others do. Persons with gallstones are also known to carry *Salmonella* longer.

### ***Do infected people need to be isolated or excluded from work or school?***

Since *Salmonella* are in the feces, only people with active diarrhea who are unable to control their bowel habits (infants, young children, certain handicapped individuals, etc.) should be isolated. Most infected people may return to work or school when their stools become formed provided that they carefully wash their hands after toilet visits. Food handlers, health care workers and children in day care must obtain the approval of the local or state health department before returning to their routine activities.

### ***What is the treatment for salmonellosis?***

Most people with salmonellosis will recover on their own or require only fluids to prevent dehydration. Antibiotics and antidiarrheal drugs are generally not recommended for typical cases with intestinal infections.

### ***How can salmonellosis be prevented?***

1. Always treat raw poultry, beef and pork as if they are contaminated and handle accordingly:
  - Wrap fresh meats in plastic bags at the market to prevent blood from dripping on other foods.
  - Refrigerate foods promptly; minimize holding time at room temperature.

- Cutting boards and counters used for meat preparation should be washed immediately after use to prevent cross contamination with other foods.
  - Avoid eating raw or undercooked meats.
  - Ensure that the correct internal cooking temperature is reached, particularly when using a microwave. Make sure that the meat is no longer pink and that any juices run clear.
2. Avoid eating raw eggs or undercooking foods containing raw eggs.
  3. Avoid using raw (unpasteurized) milk.
  4. Encourage careful hand washing before and after food preparation.
  5. Make sure children wash hands thoroughly, particularly if the children handle pets (especially reptiles and birds).
  6. Do not allow pet reptiles or birds to come in contact with infants, food, or food preparation surfaces.

***Where can I get additional information on salmonellosis?***

Contact the Georgia Division of Public Health, Epidemiology Branch, by email at [gaepinfo@ehr.state.ga.us](mailto:gaepinfo@ehr.state.ga.us). The following web sites may be useful:

- CDC Salmonellosis Fact Sheet - [http://www.cdc.gov/ncidod/dbmd/diseaseinfo/salmonellosis\\_g.htm](http://www.cdc.gov/ncidod/dbmd/diseaseinfo/salmonellosis_g.htm)
- FDA Bad Bug Book – <http://vm.cfsan.fda.gov/~mow/chap1.html>

