

# Food Safety Fact Sheet

## Foodborne Illness: Salmonella

### What is salmonella?

Salmonella is a group of bacteria that can cause diarrheal illness in humans. They are microscopic living creatures that pass from the feces of people or animals to other people or animals. Salmonella can contaminate foods, and it grows when foods are improperly handled or prepared. After consuming contaminated foods, serious intestinal problems may result.

### How is salmonella spread?

Salmonella bacteria are passed through the intestines of humans, mammals and birds. Outbreaks of salmonella have been traced to processed meats, undercooked poultry or poultry products, raw or lightly cooked foods containing egg or egg products (such as homemade ice cream), raw sausages, and unpasteurized milk and dairy products (including dried milk). Foods contaminated with rodent feces, or prepared with improperly cleaned utensils or work space, spread salmonella infection. People with symptomatic salmonella infection should not handle food.

### What are the symptoms?

Symptoms include fever, abdominal cramps, nausea and diarrhea 12 to 72 hours after infection, but symptoms may vary depending on the individual and amounts of contamination. The illness usually lasts 4 to 7 days, and most people recover without treatment. However, for some, the diarrhea may be so severe that hospitalization is required. In these patients, the salmonella infection may spread from the intestines to the blood stream, and then to other body sites. Prompt treatment with antibiotics is needed to help prevent death. Young children, people with special health conditions and senior

citizens are more likely to experience severe symptoms with complications. A doctor or health care worker should determine if treatment is necessary.

### How common is salmonella?

About 40,000 cases of salmonellosis are reported in the United States each year. Because many milder cases are not diagnosed or reported, the actual number of infections may be much higher. Salmonellosis is more common in the summer than in the winter.

### How can salmonella be prevented?

To avoid foodborne illness:

- Wash hands often, and keep your nails trimmed and clean.
- Keep work areas clean and sanitary.
- Do not use the same utensils for raw and cooked foods without thorough washing and sanitizing.
- Thaw foods in the refrigerator, and under running cold water, or as part of the cooking process.
- Keep hot foods hot and cold foods cold.
- Never let foods sit at room temperature for more than two hours.
- Never consume raw eggs or raw egg products.
- Cook poultry thoroughly.
- Hands should be washed immediately after handling diapers.
- Never consume unpasteurized (raw) milk or foods made with unpasteurized milk.
- Cook meat/poultry thoroughly to kill the bacteria.