

SALMONELLA

What It Is and How to Prevent It

Why should you care about salmonella? Because salmonella—a dangerous bacteria in food—is responsible for 2–4 million cases of food poisoning a year. More than 70 percent of the outbreaks of foodborne illnesses start in food service operations.

How It Is Spread

Salmonella bacteria is found most often in foods such as raw or undercooked poultry, eggs and meat. The bacteria can be spread in several ways:

- ◆ Human contact: touching infected food and then touching food about to be served
- ◆ Equipment: using the same kitchen utensils or countertops for infected and uninfected food
- ◆ Improper cooking: not cooking raw meat, poultry or eggs long enough or to a high enough temperature
- ◆ Bad hygiene: not washing hands after using the bathroom

Salmonella's Effects

Typically, salmonella bacteria cause relatively mild illnesses such as diarrhea, stomach cramps, nausea, vomiting and sometimes a low-grade fever that passes in a few days. But children, the elderly and those with a weakened immune system can experience worse symptoms requiring hospitalization such as high fever, severe diarrhea or life-threatening dehydration. Up to 10 percent of the time, bacteria get into a person's bloodstream, requiring drugs to stop the infection from spreading throughout the body.

Prevention

Follow these procedures to avoid salmonella poisoning.

- ◆ Wash your hands after handling raw food, garbage, money or any unclean item or surface and after using the bathroom. Washing your hands is the most important way to prevent the spread of infection.
- ◆ Use disposable gloves when handling raw foods and change gloves when changing tasks. But don't think gloves replace hand washing.
- ◆ Monitor storage temperatures, and don't leave food sitting on the counter. Bacteria can multiply to dangerous levels at room temperature.
- ◆ Cook meat to an internal temperature of 160° F and whole poultry to 180° F. Using a meat thermometer is extremely important because some ground meat browns before a safe internal temperature has been reached.
- ◆ Use smooth cutting boards made of hard maple or plastic, and replace them when they develop cracks and crevices. Wash them with hot water, soap and a scrub brush to remove food particles. Then sanitize them with a bleach solution before using for other foods.
- ◆ Keep all kitchen utensils, equipment and surfaces sanitized.
- ◆ Don't handle food or anything that touches food if you are ill.
- ◆ Cook eggs until yolks are firm and set; use pasteurized eggs if food will not be cooked further, or if pooling eggs.