

Patient instructions: Salmonella – information for patients

Salmonella is a bacterial infection. Salmonella usually spreads through food contaminated with the feces of a human or animal carrying the bacterium (such as raw or poorly cooked meat, unpasteurized milk, sprouts or other fresh products). It can be transmitted from one person to another if hand hygiene is poor. Pets, especially reptiles, may also be the source of infection.

What are the symptoms of an intestinal salmonella infection?

Symptoms usually start 6 hours to 3 days from the infection. The most common symptoms are diarrhea, abdominal pain and fever. The diarrhea lasts 4 to 10 days. The infection may also be asymptomatic, but it is still infectious. The asymptomatic carrier state usually ends in 5 weeks, but in 10% of carriers, it can last up to months.

How is a salmonella infection diagnosed and treated?

Salmonella is diagnosed in a laboratory test from a fecal sample. The disease usually heals by itself. Those with severe diarrhea must ensure adequate hydration. A physician may prescribe a course of antibiotics due to a severe or prolonged clinical picture, or the patient's state of health or age (under the age of 1 or elderly).

How can an infected person prevent the transmission of the salmonella infection?

- Wash your hands carefully with water and liquid soap before handling foods and after toilet visits (see the detailed instructions for hand washing).
- With an ill diaper-aged child, wash your hands thoroughly after changing them.
- Do not cook for others. You should refrain from having dinner parties. For more information, see the Finnish Food Authority's publication: [Tips and advice for safe cooking \(in Finnish\)](#).
- Salmonella bacteria are destroyed at 75 °C. Hot food is usually safe. Freezing food does not destroy salmonella bacteria.
- Wash cutlery normally, e.g. in a dishwasher.
- Wash soiled laundry in the washing machine at a temperature of at least 60°C.
- Wash the toilet surfaces using a chlorine detergent. To maintain hygiene, it is advisable to wash the toilet bowl, the hand wash basin, taps, pull knobs, door handles and electrical switches after a toilet visit or at least once a day.
- A sick child may return to day care when they have not had any symptoms for two days. Schoolchildren can go to school normally according to their condition.
- For a pregnant person, a salmonella carrier state can affect the choice of delivery method.
- A person performing certain food sector work may only return to high-risk work when a sufficient number of fecal samples are found to be negative. More detailed information for people in high-risk work is available from the Communicable Diseases Unit of your Wellbeing Services County.

How to wash your hands

- Open the tap using your elbow or disposable paper.
- Wet your hands under running water.
- Take liquid soap and rub your palms together.
- Rub the backs of your palms, your thumbs and the gaps between your fingers as well as your fingers interlocked against each other.
- Handwashing should take at least 30 seconds.
- Rinse your hands with plenty of water.
- Dry your hands thoroughly on your own cloth towel or on disposable paper.
- Your own cloth towel is stored so that it does not touch the towels of the rest of the family.

General instructions for avoiding a salmonella infection

- Cook all meat carefully.
- Wash raw vegetables before eating.
- Store uncooked meat separate from vegetables, cooked foods and ready-made meals.
- Avoid unpasteurized milk and dairy products.
- Wash your hands, knives and cutting boards after handling products listed above.

More information: [THL](#) website (in Finnish).