

What You Need To Know About Salmonella



The USDA defines Salmonella as bacteria that most frequently is the cause for food borne illness. In order to reduce salmonellosis, we have to find an approach from farm to table in food safety. Farmers, industries, food inspectors, retailers, food service workers, and consumers are each a critical link when it comes to food safety.

Salmonella is a gram negative, rod shaped bacilli that can cause diarrhea illness in humans. They are microscopic living creatures that pass from the feces of people or animals to other people or other animals.

There are over 2,300 serotypes of bacteria which are one-celled organisms too small to be seen without a microscope. Two types of Salmonella are Enteritidis and Salmonella Typhimurium, which are the most common in the United States. These strains of Salmonella account for half of all human infections. If present in food, it does not usually affect the taste, smell, or appearance of the food. These bacteria live in the intestinal tracts of infected animals and humans.

The foods most likely to be infected by Salmonella bacteria, are raw food of animal origin, such as meat, poultry, milk and dairy products, eggs, seafood and some fruits and vegetables. The bacteria can survive in meat, poultry, and egg products if not cooked at a safe minimum internal temperature (160° F) as measured with a food thermometer and if fruits and vegetables are not thoroughly washed. The bacteria can also contaminate other foods that come in contact with raw meats and poultry. Safe food handling practices are necessary to prevent bacteria on raw food from causing illness.

To prevent Salmonella infection, the USDA suggests the following:

- Cook poultry, ground beef and eggs thoroughly before eating. In order to insure that eggs do not contain viable Salmonella they must be cooked at least until the yolk is solid. Meat and poultry must reach 160°F or greater throughout. Pasteurized eggs are also available in some areas and for foodservice organizations.
- Do not eat or drink foods that contain raw eggs. Examples include homemade eggnog, hollandaise sauce, and undercooked French toast.
- Never drink raw (un-pasteurized) milk.
- If you are served undercooked meat, poultry or eggs in a restaurant don't hesitate to send it back to the kitchen for further cooking.
- Wash hands, kitchen work surfaces, and utensils with soap and water immediately after they have been in contact with foods of animal origin.
- Be particularly careful with foods prepared for infants, the elderly, and those with a compromised immune system.
- Wash hands with soap after handling reptiles, amphibians or birds, or after contact with pet feces. Infants and immunocompromised persons should have no direct or indirect contact with such pets.