

# Protect against *Salmonella*

Eating raw, undercooked, or unpasteurized foods may be considered fashionable in some circles. But you may make yourself vulnerable to a number of food-borne illnesses without even realizing it.

*Salmonella* is one of the most prevalent types of food-borne illnesses. Although the rate of new infections has been decreasing over the last few years, new cases of isolated outbreaks have been reported, especially of strains that are resistant to certain antibiotics.

## HOW TO PREVENT ILLNESS:

- Cook poultry, beef, and eggs thoroughly before eating.
- Do not eat or drink foods made from raw or undercooked eggs, poultry, meat, or unpasteurized milk or other dairy products made from unpasteurized milk.
- Wash all produce thoroughly before eating.
- Avoid cross-contamination of foods by keeping produce, cooked foods, and ready-to-eat foods, separate from uncooked meats and raw eggs. Thoroughly clean hands, cutting boards, counters, knives, and other utensils after handling uncooked foods.
- Wash hands before preparing foods and after coming in contact with animal feces or handling any reptiles.



Three such outbreaks in Washington and California are reported in the May 19, 1999, issue of *JAMA*.

*Salmonella* is usually transmitted through eating undercooked or raw eggs, poultry, meat, or unpasteurized dairy products. The best way to protect yourself is to never eat such foods raw or undercooked, and thoroughly wash your hands and all foods, kitchen surfaces, and utensils used to prepare food. (See other safety tips on this page.)

## SYMPTOMS:

Persons infected with *Salmonella* can develop diarrhea, fever, and abdominal cramps 12 to 72 hours after infection. The illness (called **salmonellosis**) usually lasts 4 to 7 days, and most people get better without treatment. However, some people have more severe illness that may require hospitalization and, possibly, antibiotics. These people include the elderly, infants, and those with impaired immune systems.

## WHAT IS SALMONELLA?

*Salmonella* is a group of bacteria that causes diarrheal illness in humans. It is usually spread to humans when people eat foods contaminated with animal feces. There are many different types of *Salmonella*. *S. typhimurium* and *S. enteritidis* are the 2 most common in the United States.

## POTENTIAL SOURCES OF SALMONELLA:

- Raw or undercooked beef, poultry, eggs, or unpasteurized milk (and dairy products made from unpasteurized milk).
- Many raw foods of animal origin can be contaminated, but thorough cooking usually kills *Salmonella*.
- Food can also be contaminated by the unwashed hands of an infected food handler or by coming in contact with the feces of some pets.
- The Food and Drug Administration recently advised the elderly and persons with weakened immune systems to avoid eating alfalfa sprouts, which have been associated with the spread of *Salmonella*.

## FOR MORE INFORMATION:

- Food and Drug Administration and Center for Food Safety and Applied Nutrition  
Food Information & Seafood Hotline  
800/FDA-4010  
or [www.foodsafety.gov](http://www.foodsafety.gov)
- Centers for Disease Control and Prevention  
National Center for Infectious Diseases  
888/CDC-FACTS  
or [www.cdc.gov/ncidod](http://www.cdc.gov/ncidod)

## INFORM YOURSELF:

To find this and previous *JAMA* Patient Pages, check out the AMA's Web site at [www.ama-assn.org/consumer.htm](http://www.ama-assn.org/consumer.htm). A previous *JAMA* Patient Page on seafood safety was published on August 26, 1998.

Additional Sources: CDC's National Center for Infectious Diseases, FDA's Center for Food Safety and Applied Nutrition, National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Diseases

Mi Young Hwang, Writer

Richard M. Glass, MD, Editor

Jeff Molter, Director of Science News

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