If someone has salmonella

Ideally the infected person should not prepare food. If this is not possible, then hands should be washed thoroughly, nails scrubbed and prepare only food that will be thoroughly cooked. Dishes should be washed in hot soapy water, and preferably not by the infected person.

Food Handlers

Food handlers in commercial food premises must not under any circumstances work whilst they have symptoms of a gastrointestinal illness (vomiting or diarrhoea).

Food handlers who have been free of symptoms for at least 48 hours and are not taking any anti-diarrhoeal medicines (this does not include antibiotics) may return to work providing they are meticulous with regard to their personal hygiene.

It is important for food handlers to inform their employer of their illness as some employers insist that food handlers are able to submit a negative stool specimen prior to their return to work.

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Salmonella is the second most common bacterial cause of gastrointestinal illness in this country and is classed as a food poisoning bacteria. If present in food it can multiply quite rapidly at normal room temperature. The incubation period (i.e. the time between ingestion of the bacteria, and onset of illness) is normally 12 – 36 hours. After recovering, it is not unusual for the patient to carry on excreting bacteria in their stools for a considerable length of time, and so particular attention to personal hygiene is important.

Salmonella is found in a wide range of domestic and wild animals, including poultry, pigs, cattle, and pets such as cats, dogs, snakes, lizards, tortoises, terrapins and tropical fish. Insects, birds and vermin are also carriers. Raw meat, poultry and eggs, and unpasteurised milk are the main food sources.

For some patients the illness begins with flu-like symptoms while for others the onset is sudden with diarrhoea, stomach cramps, headache, fever, nausea and sometimes vomiting. Dehydration, especially among infants and the elderly, may be severe.

How to prevent infection

The food you buy may already have Salmonella in it. This is often the case with fresh or frozen chicken, less commonly eggs, and other meats.

Food that could contain or be contaminated by bacteria should be refrigerated, at room temperature bacteria can multiply very quickly.

Heat will kill Salmonella so it is very important to cook food thoroughly and to pay particular attention to defrosting before cooking frozen foods.

Avoid eating or drinking raw or undercooked food such as eggs, unpasteurised milk or cheese made from unpasteurised milk.

Always wash your hands thoroughly with hot water after handling raw meat and poultry, after using the toilet and after contact with any animals including pets.

After preparing raw meat or poultry always wash all utensils and work surfaces with hot water and detergent to prevent contamination of other foods.

Raw meats should be stored separately from other foods in the fridge with the bottom shelf being the most suitable to avoid juices dripping on to cooked or ready to eat foods.

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Salmonella can only be passed from one person to another by the faecal-oral route. Someone with Salmonella may be quite unwell with profuse infective diarrhoea in which clothing or bedding may be soiled. When clearing up, some simple precautions to prevent spread of infection are wise:-

- Wear an apron and rubber or disposable gloves.
- Soiled bedding and clothes should be washed on the hot cycle of your washing machine.
- Clean surfaces with a chlorine based disinfectant, stand gloves in this disinfectant for 30 minutes and clean/wash apron.
- Wash your hands thoroughly.
- When the toilet is flushed the lid should be down to prevent water droplets settling on surfaces in the room. After flushing always wash your hands and clean surfaces and toilet handles frequently with a suitable disinfectant.
- Shared towels can spread bacteria from one person to another. The person with diarrhoea should be allocated separate face flannel and towels that should not be used by anyone else.
- Young children should not be bathed together or share the same bath water.