

FACT SHEET

Salmonella

Common clinical features

Diarrhoea, vomiting and abdominal pain. Malaise and fever almost always present. Dehydration may occur, particularly in infants and the elderly. Septicaemia with abscess formation in virtually any organ is an uncommon complication. Diarrhoea and fever often persist for several days. Blood may be present in the stool in 20% of cases.

Incubation period

12 hours to 3 days.

Where is it found?

Gastrointestinal tract of wild and domestic animals, birds (especially poultry) reptiles, amphibians (for example terrapins) and occasionally humans become long term carriers.

How is it acquired by affected individuals?

Predominantly from food (most commonly red and white meats, raw and undercooked eggs, milk and dairy products) following contamination of cooked food by raw food or failing to achieve adequate cooking temperatures. Contact with infected animals or animal faeces. Person to person spread from the case by close contact, usually when the case has diarrhoea. These so-called "secondary" cases are common in outbreaks.

How does the laboratory confirm the diagnosis?

The bacteria are cultured on selective media from faeces samples. Foods may be tested for the bacteria in outbreaks. A result will usually be available within 2 to 3 days but it may take several days to confirm the particular type of Salmonella.

How is it treated?

Symptomatic treatment and rehydration. Generally, antibiotics are not required for adults who are otherwise healthy and have mild to moderate disease. Antibiotics may be required for more severe cases.