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Salmonella

County Medical Officers' infection prevention sheet, patient information

What is salmonella?

Salmonella is an intestinal bacterium which can cause diarrhoea, abdominal pain, fever and sometimes vomiting. In rare cases, the bacterium can cause blood poisoning. The time between infection and falling ill is usually one to three days. The symptoms usually pass within one to two weeks, but the bacterium can remain in the gut for another few weeks. This disease generally passes of its own accord. Treatment with antibiotics is given only in complicated cases, such as those involving blood poisoning.

How is the disease transmitted, and when are carriers infectious?

The bacterium is normally transmitted through food or drink containing the pathogen. Animals such as poultry and reptiles can carry salmonella. The bacteria are destroyed by heating, which is why food which is well boiled or fried does not present a risk. Remember that cooked food can be contaminated by kitchen utensils or chopping boards which have not been cleaned, for example. Deep freezing does not destroy the bacterium. Person-to-person infection may occur, often within families, but this is not particularly common.

The bacterium is present in the gut and emerges with the faeces. The patient is most contagious when suffering from diarrhoea and this contagiousness declines as the symptoms subside. This is why it is important to take particular care with hand and toilet hygiene. If you work in healthcare/nursing or with food, it is particularly important for you to remain at home until the diarrhoea has passed and your faeces are normal. The same is applicable to preschool children.

Anyone who is free of symptoms can often remain at work or school by following the rules of conduct and hygiene advice below. However, some professions require redeployment or suspension until you are deemed to be free of infection.

What should you remember so as not to infect others? Rules of conduct and hygiene advice:

- You must not work when you have diarrhoea.
- Wash your hands thoroughly after visiting the toilet, before handling foods and before meals.
- Use liquid soap and your own towel or single-use towels.
- Keep the toilet and washbasin clean.
- If children in nappies are carriers of the disease, wash your hands thoroughly after changing their nappies. Keep your changing table very clean. Place used nappies in plastic bags which are then discarded with the rest of your refuse.
- You must not swim in a pool while you have diarrhoea.
- Children with diarrhoea must not attend preschool, but they can generally return to childcare if they are completely free of problems.
- If you work with unpackaged foods, according to European food legislation you are obliged to notify your supervisor immediately if you are infectious.

People in the following risk professions are obliged to submit stool samples, and they must be redeployed or suspended until they are deemed by their doctor to be free of infection:

- Anyone who prepares or handles unpackaged foods in a professional capacity
- Anyone who cares for infants or severely immunocompromised patients in a professional capacity

Infection with salmonella is what is known as a public health hazard according to the Swedish Communicable Diseases Act. Therefore, you are obliged to follow the rules of conduct given to you by your doctor and to assist with contact tracing which aims to locate the source of the infection or other people who may have been infected.

You may request reassessment of the rules of conduct by the County Medical Officer in your county. You must follow the rules assigned to you before any such assessment is complete.