Salmonella

What is it?
Salmonella is caused by bacteria which live in the intestines of people, birds and animals. When a person, bird or animal is infected they pass the bacteria out in their faeces (poo).

How common is it?
It is a commonly reported notifiable disease in New Zealand.

How do you know if you have it?
It usually takes between 6 and 72 hours for symptoms to show after you have been infected.

The symptoms are diarrhoea, stomach cramps and fever. Nausea and vomiting may also occur. Some people who are infected with salmonella do not have any symptoms but they are still passing out the bacteria in their faeces (poo).

A doctor will arrange for a laboratory test on a faecal (poo) specimen which will confirm if a person has salmonella. The tests can be arranged by a doctor.

How serious is it?
Salmonella does not usually cause a severe or long lasting illness. A person is normally better within two weeks.

How long is someone infectious?
A person is infectious as long as the bacteria is in their system. This varies from person-to-person and can range from a few days to several weeks from when the diarrhoea started.

How do you get salmonella?
• From swallowing contaminated food or water or contact with contaminated objects (such as toys).

Food or objects can be contaminated by someone who does not wash their hands after changing the nappy of an infected child, or when a person who is infected does not wash their hands after going to the toilet
• From eating undercooked meat and chicken
• From handling raw meat and chicken (that is contaminated with salmonella)
• From eating raw or poorly cooked eggs
• From drinking unpasteurised (raw) milk
• From drinking water from rivers, streams, shallow wells or roof rainwater that has been contaminated by infected animals and people
• From not washing hands after touching animals and birds; especially domestic and exotic pets such as lizards, rabbits, turtles and tropical fish as well as farm animals, chickens and ducks

Is there any treatment?
There is no specific treatment. For people who are otherwise healthy, antibiotics are usually not prescribed as this may prolong bacterial carriage.

It is always important to drink small amounts of fluids, frequently, when you have diarrhoea. This is very important for children and older people who are more likely to become dehydrated

What about staying away from early childhood centres, school or work?
• People who work as food handlers may be required to stop working and provide 2 faecal (poo) specimens 48 hours apart to make sure that they no longer carry the salmonella bacteria
• Adults must not go back to work or educational training centres until they have been free of symptoms for 2 days
• Children must not return to early childhood centres, kindergartens, play centres, kohanga reo or schools until they have been free of symptoms for 2 days

Remember
• Always wash and dry hands thoroughly after going to the toilet, changing a child’s nappy, before and after preparing any food (especially raw chicken) or touching any animals
• Always thoroughly cook chicken, meat and eggs
• Do not prepare food for others when you have diarrhoea
• Keep raw meat separate from cooked foods during storage and preparation
• Wash chopping boards and any utensils thoroughly after preparing raw meat and poultry
• Always treat or boil drinking water from rivers, streams, shallow wells or the roof
• Do not go swimming in pools if you have diarrhoea (runny poos)
• You can get salmonella more than once as there are many different types of salmonella and different sources.