

Typhoid Fever

(also known as enteric fever)

What is it?

Typhoid Fever is a disease caused by the bacterium (germ) *Salmonella* Typhi. Most cases in New Zealand have been caught during travel overseas, especially in tropical countries.

How common is Typhoid Fever?

Typhoid Fever is rare in New Zealand, with about 40 known cases a year.

What are the symptoms?

The illness starts slowly with fevers, chills (feeling cold and shivery), pain in the stomach, headache, feeling unwell, not wanting to eat, a dry cough, and sometimes a rash of pink spots on the chest and abdomen. Constipation is more common in adults than diarrhoea.

If anyone in your family, or any visitors to your house have symptoms they should see a doctor as soon as possible.

Once you are infected it usually takes 1 – 3 weeks for symptoms to develop, but it can take from 3 days to over 60 days.

Some people who have typhoid fever do not get sick, but may still carry the bacterium and can make others sick.

How serious is it?

The illness is often severe and most people are admitted to hospital. The infection is usually treated with antibiotics.

How long is someone infectious?

As long as typhoid bacteria are in a person's faeces (poos) they are infectious. This may be from the first week of illness throughout recovery. Some people still have the bacteria for up to 3 months after becoming unwell, and a small number become permanent carriers.

This is why clearance of people (see below) is so important.

How do you get Typhoid Fever?

Salmonella Typhi live only in humans. Persons with typhoid fever carry the bacteria in their bloodstream and intestinal tract. In addition, some people recover from typhoid fever but continue to carry the bacteria. Both ill people and carriers pass the bacteria in their faeces (poos).

You can get typhoid fever if you eat food and drink beverages that have been handled by a person who is shedding the bacteria. Important sources in some countries include water used for drinking and washing food (if it is contaminated with bacteria from sewage), shellfish (particularly oysters) from sewage-contaminated beds, raw fish, raw fruit and raw vegetables, contaminated milk/milk products (usually through the hands of carriers of the disease).

How do you prevent its spread?

Always wash and dry your hands thoroughly after going to the toilet or changing nappies of an infected infant, and before and after handling food.

The person with typhoid fever must NOT prepare food for anyone other than themselves until cleared to do so by Regional Public Health.

If you or your child is unwell, call your family doctor or Healthline on 0800 611 116 for free advice from a registered nurse 24 hours a day 7 days a week.

For further information call Public Health on (04) 570 9002 or visit www.rph.org.nz

Te Whatu Ora
Health New Zealand

Capital, Coast, Hutt Valley and Wairarapa

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Soiled clothing and linen should be washed in hot soapy water separately from that of others in the home. Face cloths and towels should not be shared with the ill person.

Toilet seats, flush handles, wash basin taps and toilet door handles should be disinfected daily with a bleach solution.

The ill person should have paper towels or their own hand towel to dry their hands after using the toilet. Paper hand towels should be put in a bag and can go out with the rubbish. The hand towel should be washed regularly.

Remember that people are infectious as long as the bacteria are present in their faeces (poos). That is why it is so important to test the faeces of cases and contacts to make sure that they are clear.

When can I go back to work, school or early childhood centre?

All people with typhoid fever are required to be excluded from work until well. This is usually 48 hours after symptoms stop. People who work in occupations where paratyphoid could easily spread (food handlers, water supply operators, certain health care staff), school (children), or early childhood centres (staff and children) are excluded from work until they have been cleared. Other close or household contacts do not need to be excluded but do need to be cleared.