

Typhoid Fever

Frequently Asked Questions

What is typhoid fever?

Typhoid (tie-foyd) fever is a disease that usually affects the intestines but it can also infect the bloodstream. It is caused by a bacterium called *Salmonella typhi*. Typhoid fever is not common in the United States, but it is still common in other parts of the world that have poor water treatment and sewer systems. Only about 20 cases of typhoid fever occur in New Jersey each year.

S. typhi is different from the other types of *Salmonella* (see "salmonellosis") that also cause illness in people.

Who gets typhoid fever?

Anyone can get typhoid fever. Those who may be most at risk are travelers to foreign countries where the disease is an ongoing problem and where drinking water is untreated or sewage treatment is poor.

How is typhoid fever spread?

Typhoid fever is spread when people swallow water or food that was contaminated with infected stool or sewage. The bacteria grow in the intestines and are passed out of the body through the stool, and sometimes through urine. The bacteria can spread if people don't wash their hands properly after using the toilet and then touch food or objects that may be placed in another person's mouth.

Some people are infected with this bacteria but do not show any symptoms. These people are called "carriers." Carriers are also able to spread the bacteria to others.

What are the symptoms of typhoid fever?

People with typhoid fever may have no symptoms at all. Symptoms of typhoid fever may include:

- Fever
- Headache
- Diarrhea
- Constipation
- Stomach pain
- Weakness
- Loss of appetite
- Rose-colored rash on trunk of body

Symptoms usually start one to three weeks after swallowing the bacteria. However, symptoms may take as long as three months to appear.

How is typhoid fever diagnosed?

If a health care provider suspects typhoid fever, a sample of the patient's stool, urine and blood will be examined.

What is the treatment for typhoid?

An antibiotic is usually prescribed by a health care provider to treat typhoid fever. (NOTE – it is very important to finish your antibiotics, even if you begin to feel better, unless otherwise directed by your health care provider.)

Can people with typhoid pass the illness to others?

An infected person can spread typhoid fever to others as long as *S. typhi* bacteria are being passed in his/her stool and urine. The *S. typhi* bacteria usually disappear from the stool about a week after symptoms end. However, some people become carriers, meaning that they no longer have symptoms but continue to pass the bacteria in their stool. The carrier state may continue for a year or more.

Should an infected person be excluded from work or school?

Most infected people may return to work or school when they no longer have diarrhea and fever. Since the *S. typhi* bacteria may continue to be passed in their stool for several weeks, they **MUST** remember to carefully wash their hands with soap and water after **EVERY** bathroom visit.

Food-handlers, such as cooks and others who prepare or touch food, are excluded from food-handling until they no longer have symptoms and they have at least three negative stool tests. Patient care givers (such as nurses) and those who provide care for young children (such as child care workers) should not work while they have symptoms and they have had at least three negative stool tests.

Children infected with *Salmonella typhi* may not return to child care until they have three negative stool tests.

Consult your local health department for further advice in these situations.

Is there a vaccine for typhoid fever?

Yes, but it is not recommended for routine use. The vaccine is given to people who:

- Work in jobs that put them at risk for infection (such as laboratory workers)
- Travel to countries where typhoid is common
- Have a family member who is ill with typhoid

What can be done to prevent typhoid fever?

- Wash hands thoroughly with soap and warm water before preparing food, before eating, and before feeding children.
- Wash hands thoroughly with soap and warm water after changing diapers and using the toilet.
- Anyone who has diarrhea should not prepare food for others.
- Make sure that all bodily wastes are properly discarded. This includes the washing or disposal of soiled diapers.
- Avoid drinking untreated water.
- Consume only pasteurized milk and dairy products.
- Avoid eating raw or undercooked fish and shellfish.
- When traveling to areas where there is typhoid, a basic rule to follow is: “Boil it, cook it, peel it, or forget it.”
- Anyone with diarrhea should not prepare food for others.

Where can I get more information?

- Your health care provider
- Your local health department
- NJ Department of Health www.nj.gov/health
- Centers for Disease Control and Prevention www.cdc.gov/typhoid-fever

This information is intended for educational purposes only and is not intended to replace consultation with a health care professional. Adapted from Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

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