

What is Typhoid fever?

Typhoid fever is caused by *Salmonella Typhi*, which is a bacterium that can cause an infection in your gut.

Common symptoms including fever, aches and pains, headache, nausea and loss of appetite usually start 10-20 days after you have been exposed. There may also be symptoms of cough and constipation (difficulty passing stools/poo). Later, people may start to have diarrhoea (or loose watery stools/poo).

Typhoid fever can be a very serious disease, but antibiotics are an effective treatment. Once on antibiotics, people start to feel better within 2 to 3 days.

Paratyphoid is an illness caused by the *Salmonella Paratyphi* bacterium. This usually causes a milder illness, which doesn't last as long.

Who can get Typhoid fever?

Typhoid fever and paratyphoid are uncommon in Europe and North America.

If you travel to parts of the world where sanitary facilities are less well developed, including some countries in Asia and Africa and in parts of Central and South America, you are more likely to get infected.

Typhoid and paratyphoid are spread mainly by eating contaminated food and water that contains the bacteria. The food and water can look clean, but cause illness. It can become

contaminated by sewage or if someone who is unwell with the infection handles it. It can also spread from person to person.

What can you do to prevent Typhoid fever?

- ensure that you are vaccinated against typhoid fever if travelling to a high-risk area (there is no vaccine for paratyphoid);
- wash your hands carefully with warm soapy water before eating or drinking, preparing food, and after using the toilet;
- help young children wash their hands if needed;
- if you have the infection, avoid cooking food for others while you are unwell and being treated – if you have to cook for others, take care to wash hands carefully before preparing a meal, drink, or eating.

In high-risk countries:

- buy bottled water or bring it to the boil for one minute before you drink it;
- ask for drinks without ice;
- eat foods that have been thoroughly cooked and that are still hot and steaming;
- avoid raw vegetables and fruits that cannot be peeled.

Wash your hands thoroughly with soap and water at these key times

- before preparing and eating food;
- after handling raw food;

- after using or cleaning the toilet;
- after attending to anyone with diarrhoea or vomiting;
- after touching anything contaminated by diarrhoea or vomiting.

How can I protect others in my household?

Here are some actions to prevent the spread of infection:

- everyone in the household should wash their hands thoroughly with soap and warm water after going to the toilet, after handling soiled clothing or bedding, and before preparing/eating food;
- the infected person should not prepare or serve food for others (or if they must, they should take care to wash hands carefully beforehand);
- clean toilet seats, toilet bowls, flush handles, taps and wash hand basins after use with detergent and hot water, followed by a household disinfectant;
- everyone in the house should have their own towel and they should not use anyone else's;
- wash the infected person's laundry separately at high temperatures.

How is Typhoid fever treated?

Typhoid is one of the few infections of the digestive system that can be successfully treated with antibiotics.

If you have confirmed typhoid in a stool/poo sample, your doctor can prescribe an

appropriate antibiotic for you.

It is advised that you drink plenty of fluids as diarrhoea or vomiting can lead to dehydration. If you feel sick and have difficulty keeping fluids down, try taking small sips of fluid frequently.

Always contact your doctor if any of the following apply:

- your symptoms are severe or do not improve after a few days;
- you have a high temperature (fever) of 38°C (100.4°F) or over;
- you have symptoms of dehydration, such as sunken eyes and passing small quantities of dark, strong smelling urine;
- you have a baby with symptoms;
- you have an immune system that is not working properly.

Do you need to stay off school or work?

Yes. While you are ill and have symptoms, you are infectious.

Certain groups of people will be asked to submit stool/poo samples for testing to ensure they have cleared the infection before returning to normal routine, because they are at greater risk of spreading illness. This will include:

- people who handle food at work;
- people who work in health care;
- young children under six years of age.

If you are not in one of these groups and unless advised otherwise, you should be able to return to work or school once you have been free from diarrhoea for at least 48 hours.



Public Health Agency, 12-22 Linenhall Street,
Belfast BT2 8BS. Tel: 028 90 321 313
www.publichealth.hscni.net