

## **MANAGING YOUR TYPHOID FEVER**

Typhoid fever, also known as enteric fever, is a bacterial infection affecting mainly the intestines. People can get it from contaminated food, water, ice, eggs, and undercooked meat. Also, people who have or carry the bacteria can spread them to others when they handle food without properly washing their hands after using the bathroom.

Typhoid fever is more common in countries without purified water systems. There are about 20 million cases of typhoid fever worldwide yearly, but only about 300 in the United States. Treated, the infection is usually curable in 2 to 3 weeks. Untreated, it can be fatal, especially in children.

The kind of bacteria named *Salmonella typhi* cause the disease. Eating or drinking something contaminated with *Salmonella* spreads the illness. Sources include raw shellfish, especially oysters, raw fruits and vegetables, water, and milk. People with weakened immune (infection-fighting) systems have increased risk for typhoid fever.

Symptoms can begin 5 to 21 days after exposure to bacteria. The most common symptoms are fever, bellyache, rose-colored rash, chills, headache, loss of appetite, exhaustion, vomiting, and constipation (more common than diarrhea at the start).

The health care provider makes a diagnosis from a medical history (including travel abroad) and physical examination. Tests of blood, stools (bowel movements), and urine are done to look for bacteria. Other tests, including x-rays, may be needed to exclude other diseases causing similar symptoms.

People should rest until symptoms go away. Then activity can slowly increase. For diarrhea, increase fluid intake and don't eat solid foods. As symptoms go away, a well-balanced, high-calorie diet can be started. The health care provider will prescribe antibiotics. Hospitalization and

intravenous fluids may be needed in severe infection. If possible, use a separate bathroom.

Otherwise, scrub the toilet with gloves and a bleach solution after each use. Hand washing is critical to prevent disease spread.

Don't use aspirin or aspirin products for fever. They can irritate the intestines. Instead, use acetaminophen and tepid sponge baths.

It can take 3 to 6 months for the infection to completely go away. Stool tests are done weekly. Negative tests 3 weeks in a row mean that the infection is gone.

### **DOs and DON'Ts of Managing Typhoid Fever**

- ✓ **DO** follow a clear liquid diet until you feel better. Drink electrolyte sports drinks.
- ✓ **DO** wash your hands well after using the bathroom.
- ✓ **DO** stay away from other people while you have a fever.
- ✓ **DO** take antibiotics as ordered and until they're all gone.
- ✓ **DO** increase fluid intake and stay on a liquid diet until diarrhea stops, then slowly start a high-calorie diet.
- ✓ **DO** call your health care provider if during treatment you have shortness of breath, temperature higher than 102° F, severe abdominal pain, or severe headache or earache.
- ✓ **DO** get vaccinated for typhoid fever if you travel to an underdeveloped country.
- ✓ **DO** be careful in an underdeveloped country. Avoid tap water, ice, and raw fruits and vegetables. Make sure that water for hot drinks is properly boiled.
- ⊗ **DON'T** make food for anyone until your infection is gone.

⊗ **DON'T** eat raw fruits or vegetables unless you peel them yourself if the water supply may not be safe.

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FOR MORE INFORMATION

Contact the following sources:

- Travelers' Health Centers for Disease Control and Prevention: Tel: (800) 311-3435;  
Website: <http://www.cdc.gov/travel/>
- National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Diseases: Tel: (301) 496-5717, (866) 284-4107; Website: <http://www3.niaid.nih.gov>

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