TYPHOID FEVER

What is typhoid fever?
Typhoid fever is caused by a bacterium called *Salmonella enterica* serotype Typhi (S. Typhi) (formerly known as *Salmonella typhi*). Most infections originate from outside Australia. It is common in developing countries and is transmitted by contaminated food or water. Children, older people, and travellers are more likely to contract it.

What are the symptoms?
The main symptoms of typhoid fever are fever and chills, and later abdominal pain. Less common symptoms include diarrhoea or constipation, headache, cough, and intestinal bleeding. Symptoms usually start 8 to 14 days after infection with the bacteria. Some people have no symptoms.

How is typhoid fever spread?
Typhoid fever is spread through ingestion of contaminated food or water. The food or water would have been contaminated by an infected person, even though this person may not have symptoms. Infection is most common in places with poor sanitation. Typhoid is common in the Indian subcontinent, in southern Asia, southern Africa, Papua New Guinea and other Pacific Island nations.

Who is at risk of infection?
Anyone can be infected but young children and the elderly are more susceptible. Travellers to areas where typhoid fever is endemic are more likely to be exposed.

How is it diagnosed?
A diagnosis of typhoid is usually done by laboratory testing of a faecal or blood sample.

What treatment is available?
Antibiotics are needed to treat typhoid fever. The bacteria are often resistant to some antibiotics (fluoroquinolones), especially if they originated from the Indian subcontinent or South-East Asia. Patients may need to be treated in hospital, especially when the bacteria have entered the blood stream causing a blood infection (septicaemia). Supportive or other therapy including adequate hydration is also important. Antibiotics are also required to treat infected people who have no symptoms. Antibiotics can help reduce the time a person is infectious.

Should I be at work or school?
Children should be excluded from childcare or school until cleared by their medical practitioner. People with typhoid fever, or who share a house with an infected person, must not work if their work involves food handling, or caring for children, sick people, and the elderly. Prior to returning to work or school cases and their contacts need to have no symptoms and to be shown to no longer carry the infection. This is proven by having a number of faecal samples tested that all show negative results.

How is it prevented?
Vaccination is an important measure to prevent typhoid infection. Before you are travelling to a country where typhoid is common, you should consider being vaccinated at least two weeks prior to arrival. Your doctor will advise when revaccination is required to maintain immunity.

When travelling in developing countries, people should avoid consuming risky food and drinks. More specifically:
- Avoid uncooked foods, including fruit unless it is able to be peeled;
- Avoid untreated water, including ice;
• Drink beverages only from sealed containers;
• Wash hands often, especially after going to the toilet and before eating or handling food;
• If soap and water are unavailable, use an alcohol-based hand gel (with at least 60% alcohol);
• Avoid eating from street stalls; and
• Ensure hot food is thoroughly cooked and eaten while hot.

Need more information?
For more information on typhoid fever contact your doctor or call the Health Protection Service, Communicable Disease Control Information Line during business hours on (02) 6205 2155.

Communicable Disease Control Section at the Health Protection Service is responsible for the investigation and surveillance of notifiable or infectious conditions in the ACT in order to control or prevent their spread in the community. This includes the promotion of immunisation, education and other strategies that help to limit the spread of diseases.

Typhoid fever is a notifiable disease. Cases notified to ACT Health are investigated by Public Health Officers.

Acknowledgements

Accessibility
The ACT Government is committed to making its information, services, events and venues, accessible to as many people as possible.