

# Fact Sheet – Typhoid Fever

## What is Typhoid fever?

Typhoid fever is a disease caused by a bacterium called *Salmonella Typhi*.

In New Zealand, there are very few cases of typhoid fever. In the Auckland region from 2000 to 2005, on average 19 cases were investigated per year. The majority of cases are infected while travelling overseas.

## How do you get Typhoid fever?

Typhoid is spread person-to-person via the faecal-oral route, or via food or water that has been contaminated.

Untreated water supplies, shellfish gathered from areas where water is contaminated or food handled by a person carrying the infection are also potential sources of infection.

## What are the symptoms?

Typhoid infection usually begins with a fever occurring up to 60 days after infection. If the infection gets into the bloodstream it can cause an illness with fever, headache and possibly a rash. The fever may last a week or more. Diarrhoea may not appear until 3 weeks into the illness, if at all.

## How is Typhoid fever diagnosed?

The best way to diagnose Typhoid fever is to take a blood test. The bacteria can be grown from the blood in the early stages of the illness. Later, even after diarrhoea has stopped, the bacteria may continue to be excreted in bowel motions for weeks.

## How is Typhoid fever treated?

Hospital admission is common. Antibiotics are recommended to treat a fever or persistent diarrhoea and may be used for those who are employed in high risk occupations such as food handling, early childhood services or health care. Relapse after treatment does occur from time to time. If this occurs the patient should see a GP.

## How can Typhoid fever be prevented?

- Wash and dry hands thoroughly after using the toilet or changing nappies. Hands should be washed for 20 seconds and dried for a further 20 seconds using a clean cloth or disposable towel.
- Soiled clothing and linen should be washed with hot soapy water separately from that of other family members. Items such as face cloths and towels should be kept for personal use.
- A person with Typhoid infection should avoid preparing food for others in the family until they are no longer infectious. In households where a person is recovering from typhoid, toilet seats, flush handles, wash basin taps and toilet door handles should be disinfected daily using a hypochlorite based solution. Ideally the solution should be in contact with the surface of the object for at least ½ hour.

## What does the public health service do?

Auckland Regional Public Health Service (ARPHS) receives notification of all cases of Typhoid fever and is responsible for investigating the source of the illness and preventing its spread.