



# Typhoid Fever Fact Sheet

## What is typhoid fever?

Typhoid fever is a life-threatening illness caused by the bacterium *Salmonella Typhi*. Several hundred people develop this disease in the United States annually with approximately 75% of cases acquired during travel to underdeveloped countries, including Asia, Africa and Latin America. Typhoid fever is uncommon in Oklahoma with up to 3 cases were reported annually in the state.

## What are the symptoms of typhoid fever?

Typhoid fever may cause mild to severe symptoms. Persons with typhoid fever usually have a sustained fever as high as 103° to 104°F (39° to 40°C). Symptoms also include:

- Weakness
- Headache
- Stomach pains
- Loss of appetite
- Constipation or diarrhea
- Rash of flat, rose-colored spots on the trunk of the body

## How is typhoid fever spread?

*Salmonella typhi* lives only in humans; there are no animals that carry it. Persons with typhoid fever carry the bacteria in their bloodstream and intestinal tract while

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symptomatic. It is more common in areas of the world where water is more likely to be contaminated with sewage. Additionally, the bacteria may shed through the feces, thus making improper food handling very risky. Typhoid fever can be spread through contaminated food or beverage.

## **How long can an infected person carry typhoid fever?**

The disease can be spread to others as long as the bacteria remain in the stool and urine, which may vary from days to years. Approximately 10% of untreated typhoid fever cases will continue to shed the bacteria in their feces for 3 months after experiencing symptoms; 2% to 5% become permanent carriers.

## **Do infected people need to be excluded from work or school?**

If a person is employed as a food handler, works in a day care center, or has direct patient care duties, they must not work while they have diarrhea. Children with diarrhea should not attend a day care center or a school setting. People who are sick with typhoid fever will be given specific instructions by a public health nurse or epidemiologist about working with food, providing direct patient care, and working in/attending a day care center or school setting.

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## **What is the treatment for typhoid fever?**

Antibiotics may be prescribed by a doctor to treat typhoid fever. Once given antibiotics, persons usually begin to feel better within 48-72 hours. However, persons who do not get treatment may continue to have symptoms of illness for weeks or months. The fatality rate is less than 1% for those given timely treatment.

## **How can typhoid fever be prevented?**

Food handlers infected with typhoid fever should never work while symptomatic and always use good handwashing techniques- especially after each use of the restroom.

*For further information, contact the  
Oklahoma City-County Health Department  
(405) 425-4437*

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