Salmonella in the News

What kind of germ is Salmonella and why is it in the news?

Salmonella are bacteria that can cause serious and sometimes fatal infections (salmonellosis) in young children, frail or elderly people, and others with weakened immune systems. Healthy persons infected with Salmonella often experience fever, diarrhea (which may be bloody), nausea, vomiting and abdominal pain. In rare circumstances, infection with Salmonella can result in the organism getting into the bloodstream and producing more severe illnesses such as arterial infections (i.e., infected aneurysms), endocarditis and arthritis.

Salmonella live in the intestinal tracts of humans and other animals, including birds. Salmonella are usually transmitted to humans by eating foods contaminated with animal feces. Foods can be contaminated by water, soil and by unwashed hands. Salmonella can be transferred to another food or object through cross-contamination.

Most recently, Salmonella bacteria have been reported in cantaloupe and peanut butter, but they can be in any food of animal or plant origin. Food sources of Salmonella include contaminated eggs, poultry, meat, unpasteurized milk or juice, cheese, contaminated raw fruits and vegetables (alfalfa sprouts, melons), spices and nuts. Reptiles (snakes, turtles, lizards), amphibians (frogs), birds (baby chicks) and pet food and treats are sources of Salmonella.
How can you prevent salmonellosis?

- Cook poultry, ground beef and eggs thoroughly. Do not eat or drink foods containing raw eggs, or raw (unpasteurized) milk.
- If you are served undercooked meat, poultry or eggs in a restaurant, don’t hesitate to send it back to the kitchen for further cooking.
- Wash hands, kitchen work surfaces and utensils with soap and water immediately after they have been in contact with raw meat or poultry.
- Wash produce in clean water. Clean produce with tough skins with a vegetable brush before cutting or slicing.
- Be particularly careful with foods prepared for infants, the elderly and the immunocompromised.
- Wash hands with soap after handling reptiles, birds, or baby chicks, and after contact with pet feces.
- Avoid direct or even indirect contact between reptiles (turtles, iguanas, other lizards, snakes) and infants or immunocompromised persons.
- Don’t work with raw poultry or meat, and an infant (e.g., feed, change diaper) at the same time.
- Mother’s milk is the safest food for young infants. Breastfeeding prevents salmonellosis and many other health problems.

What does a recall of a food mean?
A food recall occurs when there is reason to believe that a food may cause consumers to become ill. A food manufacturer or distributor initiates the recall to take foods off the market. In some situations, food recalls are requested by government agencies such as USDA or FDA.

What should you do if you have a recalled product in your home?

1. **Don’t panic.** Most recalls are issued because there is a potential for the food to be contaminated. They often are precautionary and not associated with an outbreak.
2. **Don’t eat the food.** Do not give it away to other people or pets.
3. **Don’t open the food.** You cannot see, smell or taste the bacteria. If you do open the product, wash your hands thoroughly with warm water and soap for 20 seconds after handling it.
4. **Check the recall notice to find out what to do with the food.** Typically, you will return the product to the store where you bought it for a refund or dispose of it.

Recall notices are posted on the foodsafety.gov website.