

Typhoid fever is a systemic disease of the intestinal tract and bloodstream that is caused by *Salmonella typhi*, a bacteria which only infects humans. Paratyphoid fever has similar symptoms to typhoid fever but is generally a milder disease which affects animals as well as humans.

The severity of typhoid fever is variable. Most people affected will experience a fever, malaise, headache, loss of appetite. Constipation, which is more common than diarrhoea, might occur early in the course of the illness and a rash of rose-coloured spots may be seen on the trunk. An enlarged spleen and liver affects 50% of infected people. Fever is commonly lowest in the morning, reaching a peak in late afternoon or evening. Gastrointestinal and cerebral complications are more likely to occur in untreated cases or those in which diagnosis is delayed. Without treatment typhoid fever can be fatal.

How do you catch typhoid fever?

Typhoid is predominantly a disease of low income countries where sanitation is inadequate and there is a lack of clean water. It is transmitted following ingestion of heavily contaminated food or water. Outbreaks have occurred when water supplies have been contaminated with sewage containing the bacteria. In areas where the water quality is high, transmission is more likely to occur from carriers handling and contaminating food.

Incubation period

7 – 14 days.

Diagnosis

Diagnosis is by clinical examination and culture of blood, faeces, or bone marrow.

Prevention

Vaccinations do not provide complete protection against typhoid fever so it is important to practise food and water hygiene precautions. Avoid ice creams, ice cubes or fruit juices, especially from street vendors. Ensure that the seal of bottled water is intact. Try to avoid raw vegetables, peeled fruit, shellfish or salads that may have been prepared in contaminated water. Take care with personal hygiene; wash hands frequently and remember to clean teeth with bottled water.

Two typhoid vaccines are licensed for use in the UK. Vaccination is recommended for travellers whose activities put them at higher risk of typhoid in areas where sanitation and food hygiene are likely to be poor. There is no vaccination available to prevent paratyphoid infection.

Treatment

Treatment with prescribed antibiotics is very effective.



This information is produced by MASTA as a general guide to be used in conjunction with advice from your doctor or nurse. To obtain a health brief tailored to your journey visit a MASTA associated travel clinic or www.masta-travel-health.com