

hand hygiene

From Turkey to Turtles, This Outbreak-Prone Bacteria Sickens Thousands

I nearly ruined Thanksgiving this past year (sorry to remind you), but it wasn't my fault. I blame the cooks!

I'm a rod-shaped, gram-negative member of the family Enterobacteriaceae with more than 2500 known serotypes. I am a common cause of diarrhea, fever, and stomach cramps, and the US Centers for Disease Control and Prevention estimates that I cause about 1.35 million illnesses, 26,500 hospitalizations, and 420 deaths in the United States every year.

I live in the intestinal tracts of animals and humans and am shed via feces. I infect others who consume contaminated food or ingest contaminated water. I can also wreak havoc on those who have touched infected animals, their feces, or their environments.

Raw meat, raw eggs, and some fresh fruits and vegetables are common sources of infection, and those who travel internationally or who own pet birds or reptiles are at increased risk for infection.

I'm more common in the summer (must be all those barbecues!), and I cause particular trouble for people with severe illness, people taking certain medications, people with weakened immune systems, adults older than 50 who have medical problems (such as heart disease), infants, and adults age 65 or older.

Antibiotic treatment is recommended for these at-risk populations. In healthy people, I typically run my course in 4 to 7 days.

My symptoms include diarrhea, blood in the stool, fever, and stomach cramps. Some people may experience nausea, vomiting, or headache, and symptoms usually start within 6 hours or up to 4 days after infection.

In extreme cases, I can cause severe dehydration and life-threatening complications, such as bacteremia or reactive arthritis, if I spread beyond the intestines.

Diagnosis involves a laboratory test of stool, body tissue, or fluids.

I had a blast in 2019, triggering outbreaks involving ground beef, pet turtles, pig ear dog treats, papayas, backyard poultry, pre-cut melon, frozen raw tuna, and pet hedgehogs, just to name a few.

Oh, and turkey, of course.

Who am I? 

Salmonella



What's Bugging You?

Have an idea for our Bug of the Month? By all means tell us. We're also always looking for other story ideas to make *Infection Control Today* required reading for those on the frontlines of healthcare. Contact Associate Editorial Director Alexandra Ward at award@mjlifesciences.com.