

# WEST AFRICAN RESCUE ASSOCIATION

## TYPHOID FEVER: WHAT YOU NEED TO KNOW

### WHAT IS TYPHOID FEVER?

Typhoid fever can be a life-threatening febrile disease, caused by the bacterium *Salmonella typhi*. According to the Centre for Disease and Control an estimated 22 million cases of typhoid fever and 200,000 related deaths occur worldwide every year. Typhoid is common in most parts of the developing world. In Ghana, a study conducted in 2010 has shown that the typhoid fever ranks among the leading 20 causes of outpatient illness, accounting for 0.92% of hospital admissions.

### TYPHOID FEVER TRANSMISSION

*Salmonella Typhi* lives only in humans. Persons with typhoid fever carry the bacteria in their bloodstream and intestinal tract. A small number of people can carry the disease without being “ill”. They are called “carriers”. Both ill persons and carriers shed *Salmonella Typhi* in their feces (stool) and can spread the disease.

Typhoid fever is transmitted through the ingestion of food or drinks that have been handled by a person who is shedding *Salmonella Typhi* or if sewage contaminated with the bacteria gets into drinking water. Therefore, Typhoid fever is common in areas where hand washing is less frequent and water is likely to be contaminated with sewage. Once ingested *Salmonella Typhi* bacteria multiply and spread into the bloodstream.

### SYMPTOMS OF TYPHOID FEVER

Symptoms usually develop 1 to 3 weeks after exposure, and may be mild or severe. They include high fever (39° to 40°C), fatigue, weakness, stomach pains, headache, constipation or diarrhea, and loss of appetite. In some cases, patients have a rash of flat, rose-colored spots on the chest and enlarged spleen and liver.

Even when a patient is without symptoms, he may still be carrying *Salmonella Typhi*. If so, the illness could return, or the patient could pass the disease to other people.

### DIAGNOSIS OF TYPHOID FEVER

Typhoid fever is usually confirmed by identifying *Salmonella Typhi* in a culture of the blood or other body fluid (urine and stools).

For the culture, a small sample of the patient's blood, urine and stool is placed in a container to grow the bacteria. This takes between 48 to 72 hours, for the culture to be checked under a microscope for the presence of the bacteria.

## **TREATMENT OF TYPHOID FEVER**

Typhoid fever can be treated with antibiotics which kill the bacteria. Appropriate antibiotic therapy usually results in an improvement within 1 or 2 days and recovery within 7 to 10 days. Several antibiotics are effective for the treatment of typhoid fever. Early and reliable diagnostics is essential to ensure that patients are put on the appropriate treatment.

Medication used can have side effects, and long-term use can lead to the development of antibiotic-resistant bacteria. Resistance is becoming widespread causing a major problem in the treatment of typhoid fever.

If left undiagnosed and untreated Typhoid can kill up to 30% of people who get it.

If you are being treated for typhoid fever, it is important to:

- Take all the prescribed doses of medications.
- Wash your hands carefully with soap and water each time after using the bathroom.
- Do not prepare or serve food for other people. This will lower the chance that you will pass the infection on to someone else.
- Ensure that you test all people who are handling food in your household for possible contamination.

## **PREVENTION FOR TYPHOID FEVER**

1. Avoiding eating or drinking food from high risk places - road side cafes for example.
2. Getting vaccinated against typhoid fever.
3. Testing all people handling foods in your household

### **BOIL IT, COOK IT, PEEL IT OR FORGET IT**

- Be well informed and educated when you live or travel of the water and food risks of the area.
- Drink bottled water or boil water for 1 minute before you drink it when living/travelling to places with water risks.
- Drink fluids without ice and avoid flavored ices that may have been made with contaminated water in high risk areas.
- Eat hot and steaming foods that have been thoroughly cooked.
- Peel raw fruits and vegetables before eating them. Avoid unpeeled ones. Vegetables like lettuce are easily contaminated and are very hard to wash well.
- Avoid foods and beverages from street vendors. It is difficult for food to be kept clean on the street.

### **VACCINATION**

If you live or you are traveling to a country where typhoid is common, you should consider being vaccinated against typhoid. Visit your doctor to discuss vaccination options and protocols.

You will need to complete your vaccination at least 1 to 2 weeks before you travel so the vaccine has time to take effect. Typhoid vaccines lose effectiveness after several years. If you were vaccinated in the past, check with your doctor to see if it is time for a booster vaccination.