

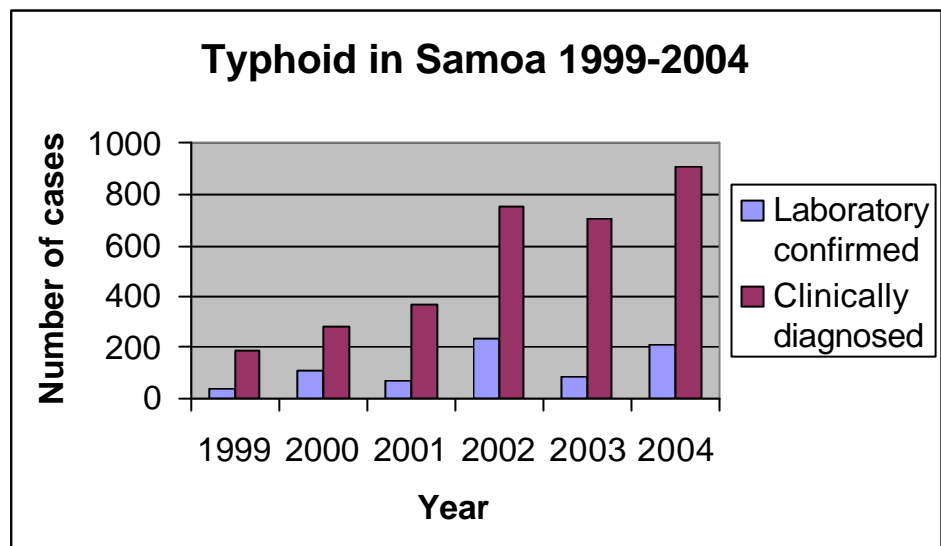
Typhoid continues in Samoa

Typhoid fever is considered endemic in Samoa, with outbreaks initially noted following two cyclones in 1990 and 1991 that devastated the country, causing considerable damage to infrastructure. After apparently being brought under control in the mid-1990s, case numbers have increased in recent years, and have been acknowledged as reaching epidemic proportions.

In 2004, the World Health Organization provided technical assistance through a Short Term Consultant, and a Typhoid Task Force was established by the Ministry of Health (MoH) to assist the Communicable Disease Control Committee in the national control of typhoid.

Numbers of clinical and laboratory-confirmed cases for each year from 1999–2004 are shown in the figure beside. For 2005 (data not shown), numbers of cases per month are similar to those seen in 2004.

Below is a summary of the situation and the control and prevention measures undertaken by the MoH, based on a press release put out by the Typhoid Task Force in July 2005.



Ministry of Health Warning: Typhoid continues in Samoa

Current high rate of typhoid cases

The Public Health Division of the Ministry of Health in Samoa is calling on the public and visitors to take special care with hand washing and food hygiene after the latest health figures show continuing high rates of typhoid. Nineteen cases were confirmed in June 2005, up from 10 in May. However, local medical staff say the true numbers may be much higher than those reported as not everybody with typhoid attends a hospital or other health facility in the private sector, and not all cases are confirmed by laboratory tests. They thus stress the importance of people in Samoa taking this problem very seriously as it remains a public health problem of grave concern.

Symptoms of typhoid include sustained high fever, headache, fatigue, loss of appetite and gastrointestinal symptoms, usually constipation. Mild cases may cause only diarrhoea. Severe infections can lead to bleeding from the intestines and even death if not treated.

Management of typhoid

Anyone who becomes ill with symptoms consistent with those of typhoid fever (above) should seek medical advice at their nearest health care facility. The diagnosis of typhoid is confirmed by a blood test and it is treated with antibiotics. All patients who are confirmed to have typhoid must have a stool (faeces) test carried out one month later to verify that their

system is clear of the bacteria. They should avoid preparing food for others until this test shows up clear. They and everyone in the household should take extra care to wash their hands thoroughly after going to the toilet and before touching food.

Family and household members of patients confirmed with typhoid are encouraged to have stool samples tested as well, even if they have never had symptoms of typhoid. This is to check whether they are “carrying” the bacteria asymptotically. Typhoid carriers are also treated with antibiotics to kill the bacteria. To stop the spread of typhoid in the community, it is very important for typhoid carriers to be identified and treated.

Follow-up and contact tracing of typhoid cases

Environmental Health staff in the Ministry of Health’s Division of Public Health are primarily responsible for carrying out household and village investigations in areas where typhoid cases have been confirmed. They are looking for factors that lead to typhoid transmission in the community including any contamination of water supplies or shellfish-gathering areas with sewerage; unsanitary toilet facilities where flies can access faeces and potentially pick up typhoid bacteria; and unsafe food preparation areas or practices that expose food to flies.

Typhoid prevention — key health promotion messages

The Ministry of Health is running a multimedia campaign that includes TV and radio spots, newspapers and IEC materials on Food Safety measures, including workshops to educate the public about typhoid and protecting their families.

Key points:

- Always wash your hands with soap and water, and dry them thoroughly, after going to the toilet and before eating or handling food.
- Use enough toilet paper to minimise contact with faeces.
- Teach children the above two practices, and reinforce their importance.
- Ensure toilet facilities are screened or kept closed so that flies cannot gather.
- Protect food preparation areas from flies.
- Use scrupulous cleanliness in food preparation and handling; refrigerate food as appropriate. Pay particular attention to the storage of salads and other foods served cold.
- If uncertain about sanitary practices (e.g. when eating outside the home), choose foods that are cooked and served hot, and fruit peeled by the consumer.
- Boil or steam shellfish for at least 10 minutes before eating.
- If there is any doubt about water quality, and especially in areas with untreated water supplies, boil water for drinking or use an alternative clean source.
- Encourage breast feeding throughout infancy; boil all other water and milk used for infant feeding.
- If someone in the household or family is diagnosed with typhoid, be aware that others may also be infected and/or develop symptoms. Make sure anyone who becomes sick gets appropriate treatment and follow up, and that the whole family knows how to avoid spreading the bacteria. Please assist Ministry of Health staff in their investigations to determine the source of the infection.

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