

Campylobacteriosis

What is campylobacteriosis?

Campylobacteriosis is an infection caused by bacteria called *Campylobacter*. It affects the intestinal tract (gut) and causes diarrhea.

Who gets campylobacteriosis?

Anyone can get campylobacteriosis, although babies and children are more likely to have serious illness. *Campylobacter* is one of the most common causes of diarrheal illness in the United States.

How is campylobacteriosis spread?

The bacteria are commonly found in the gut of animals and birds, which carry the bacteria without becoming ill. The bacteria can infect people who drink unpasteurized (raw) milk or contaminated water, or eat undercooked meats, especially chicken. Just one drop of raw chicken juice can contain more than 500 bacteria, enough to cause illness. Other food items can be contaminated, for example from improperly cleaned cutting boards. Handling infected animals without carefully washing hands afterwards may also lead to illness.

What are the symptoms of campylobacteriosis?

Campylobacteriosis may cause mild to severe diarrhea, often with traces of blood in the stool. Most people also get a fever and stomach cramping, and some may have nausea and vomiting. The illness usually lasts about one week. Some infected persons do not have any symptoms. In people with weakened immune systems, the bacteria can occasionally spread to the bloodstream and cause a life-threatening infection. In rare cases, *Campylobacter* infection results in long-term effects, such as arthritis or a condition called Guillain-Barre syndrome, which affects the nerves of the body and begins several weeks after the diarrheal illness.

How soon after exposure do symptoms appear?

The symptoms generally appear two to five days after the exposure.

What is the treatment for campylobacteriosis?

Most people infected with *Campylobacter* will recover without treatment. Persons with diarrhea should drink plenty of fluids. Antibiotics are sometimes used to treat severe cases, to prevent relapses, or to shorten the carrier phase in food handlers, children in day care and healthcare workers. Your doctor will decide whether antibiotics are necessary.

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How can campylobacteriosis be prevented?

- Wash hands before and after handling food, after toileting or diapering, and after handling animals.
- Always treat raw poultry, beef and pork as if they are contaminated and handle accordingly.
- Wrap fresh meats in plastic bags at the market to prevent blood from dripping on other foods.
- Refrigerate foods promptly; minimize holding at room temperature.
- Defrost food safely, either in the refrigerator or in a microwave oven on "defrost setting." Never defrost food at room temperature.
- Cutting boards, counters and utensils used for preparing raw meat should be washed with soap and water immediately after use.
- Cook food thoroughly. All poultry should be cooked to reach a minimum internal temperature of 165° F.
- Avoid eating raw eggs or undercooking foods containing raw eggs.
- Avoid drinking raw milk or untreated water.

How long is a person able to spread campylobacteriosis?

Generally, infected people will continue to pass the germ in their stool (feces) for a few days to several weeks. Certain antibiotics may shorten this carrier phase. People with diarrhea should be excluded from day care, patient care, and food handling. Most infected people may return to work or school when their diarrhea stops, provided that they carefully wash their hands after using the toilet and before preparing food.

How can I get more information about campylobacteriosis?

- 1) If you have concerns about campylobacteriosis, contact your healthcare provider.
- 2) Call your local health department. A directory of local health departments is located at <http://www.vdh.virginia.gov/LHD/index.htm>.
- 3) Visit the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention website at <http://www.cdc.gov/nczved/divisions/dfbmd/diseases/campylobacter/>.