

FACT SHEET

CAMPYLOBACTERIOSIS

What is Campylobacteriosis?

Campylobacteriosis is a diarrheal illness caused by infection with a bacterium called *Campylobacter*. People who become ill with campylobacteriosis typically get diarrhea, cramping, abdominal pain, and fever. The illness usually occurs in the summer months.

Who can be infected?

Anyone may become infected, however campylobacteriosis is most common in infants and young adults.

How are the bacteria spread?

Improper handling of raw poultry, eating raw or undercooked poultry, and drinking unpasteurized milk is all means of becoming infected. In addition, eating or drinking food or water that is contaminated by the feces (stool) of infected people or animals; without washing hands afterwards can spread the bacteria.

What are the symptoms of *Campylobacter* infection?

The major symptom is diarrhea, which may be either mild or severe. Stomach cramps, fever, nausea, vomiting and generally "not feeling well" can also occur. Severe cases can mimic appendicitis.

How soon after infection do symptoms appear?

The symptoms usually start 2 - 5 days after infection, with a range from 1 - 10 days. Many persons who are infected may have no symptoms.

Are there long-term consequences of *Campylobacter* infection?

Most people recover completely within 2 - 5 days, although sometimes recovery can take up to 10 days. Relapses can occur. Rarely, some long-term consequence can occur. Some people may have arthritis following campylobacteriosis, others may develop a rare disease called Guillain-Barré syndrome. This syndrome may lead to paralysis that lasts several weeks and usually requires intensive care.

Where is *Campylobacter* found?

Many animals, such as cats, cows, dogs, and birds (especially chickens), carry the bacteria in their intestines. Infected animals may contaminate meat products, water supplies, milk, and other food items.

How long can a person spread *Campylobacter*?

People can spread the bacteria to others for a few days to several weeks after they are infected.

Should infected persons be excluded from school or work?

Since the bacteria are passed in the feces, people with diarrhea (especially children in child care or people who handle food) should not go to school or work. After diarrhea ends, persons may return to normal activities but they should carefully wash their hands after using the toilet and before preparing or eating food.

What is the treatment for *Campylobacter* infection?

Most people get well without treatment. Persons with diarrhea should drink plenty of liquids. Antibiotics such as erythromycin or a fluoroquinolone can be used, and can shorten the duration of symptoms if they are given early in the illness.

How can the spread of *Campylobacter* infection be stopped?

1. Always refrigerate poultry and meat products. Never leave raw poultry or meat at room temperature.
2. Always cook poultry completely. Never eat raw poultry.
3. Avoid consuming unpasteurized milk.
4. Carefully wash hands before and after preparing food.
5. Make sure children wash their hands carefully, especially after using the toilet, having diapers changed or handling pets.
6. Always wash hands with soap and warm water after using the toilet or changing diapers.

Always wash food preparation surfaces and utensils between cutting up raw meat or poultry and other foods.