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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, children, and people with weakened immune systems are more likely to have serious illness. *Campylobacter* is one of the most common causes of diarrheal illness in the United States.

How are *Campylobacter* bacteria 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 and organs, especially chicken. Just one drop of raw chicken juice can contain enough bacteria to cause illness. Other food items can be contaminated, for example, from contact with improperly cleaned cutting boards. Handling infected animals, without carefully washing hands afterwards, can also lead to illness.

What are the symptoms of campylobacteriosis?

Campylobacteriosis can cause mild to severe diarrhea, often with traces of blood in the stool. Most people also have a fever and stomach cramping, and some might have nausea and vomiting. The illness usually lasts about one week. Some people infected with *Campylobacter* do not have any symptoms. In people with weakened immune systems, the bacteria can spread occasionally 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.

How is campylobacteriosis diagnosed?

Campylobacteriosis is diagnosed when a laboratory test detects *Campylobacter* bacteria in stools, body tissue, or fluids.

What is the treatment for campylobacteriosis?

Most people with a *Campylobacter* infection will recover without treatment. People with diarrhea

should drink plenty of fluids. Antibiotics are sometimes used to treat the very ill or those at high risk for severe disease. Your doctor will decide whether antibiotics are necessary.

How can campylobacteriosis be prevented?

- Wash hands with soap and water 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.
- Refrigerate foods promptly; minimize holding at room temperature.
- Wrap fresh meat in plastic bags at the market to prevent juices from dripping on other foods.
- Defrost food safely, either in the refrigerator or in a microwave oven on "defrost setting." Defrosting food at room temperature promotes bacterial growth and risk of illness.
- 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. Eggs and any foods that contain raw eggs should also be cooked thoroughly.
- Be sure any milk or juices have been pasteurized and water has been properly treated before drinking them.

How long can an infected person carry and shed the *Campylobacter* bacteria?

Generally, people will continue to pass the bacteria in their stool (feces) for a few days to several weeks after becoming infected with *Campylobacter*. Certain antibiotics may shorten this carrier phase.

Should an infected person be excluded from work or school?

People who have diarrhea should not work as food handlers, or provide care for children or patients. Children who have diarrhea should not go to child care or school. Most infected people may return to work or school 24 hours after diarrhea stops, provided that they are careful to wash their hands with soap and water after using the toilet and before preparing food.

How can I get more information about campylobacteriosis?

- If you have concerns about campylobacteriosis, contact your healthcare provider.
- Call your local health department. A directory of local health departments is located at the [VDH Local Health Districts page](#).
- Visit the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention website at [the CDC's page on *Campylobacter*](#).

Translations

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