

Campylobacteriosis

What is campylobacteriosis?

Campylobacteriosis is an infection caused by the *Campylobacter* bacteria. It most commonly causes gastroenteritis. In Australia, *Campylobacter* is considered the most common cause of bacterial gastroenteritis and is frequently associated with the handling and consumption of contaminated chicken meat.

What are the symptoms?

The most frequently seen symptoms in cases of campylobacteriosis are diarrhoea (often containing blood or mucous), abdominal pain, fever, nausea, vomiting and fatigue. The symptoms usually occur between two to five days after exposure to the bacteria. Gastrointestinal symptoms may last for several days to two weeks. Sometimes, there are no symptoms at all.

Occasionally *Campylobacter* can enter the bloodstream from the bowel and cause more serious infection. *Campylobacter* infections have also been associated with rare conditions including reactive arthritis and Guillain-Barré Syndrome (acute idiopathic polyneuritis).

How is it spread?

Campylobacter is common in most warm blooded animals including poultry, cattle, pigs, and in pets including cats and dogs. *Campylobacter* infections are spread by people eating, drinking or handling contaminated food (particularly chicken), untreated water or unpasteurised milk. The infection can also be spread through contact with household pets and farm animals that carry the bacteria. It is uncommon for *Campylobacter* to be spread from one person to another person.

Who is at risk of campylobacteriosis?

Anyone can develop campylobacteriosis. Babies and young children, the elderly, and those with compromised immune systems are at greatest risk.

How is it diagnosed?

Campylobacteriosis is usually diagnosed by laboratory testing of a faeces (poo) sample.

How is it treated?

Gastroenteritis due to *Campylobacter* is usually treated with supportive measures, such as increasing fluid intake. Most people will recover from *Campylobacter* gastroenteritis in around a week. Maintaining hydration is very important. Antibiotics are generally only recommended for more serious cases (e.g. when the person is unwell enough to require hospitalisation).

How can campylobacteriosis be prevented?

The following points outline some effective ways to prevent *Campylobacter* infections:

- Ensure all foods, especially meats such as chicken, are well cooked prior to being eaten. Fruits and vegetables not undergoing cooking should be properly washed. The internal temperature of all reheated foods should reach at least 75°C. Consider freezing raw chicken if not cooking immediately.
- Ensure appropriate kitchen hygiene, including the separation of vegetable and meat preparation areas and utensils.
- Ensure good personal hygiene. Always wash hands with soap and running water, especially after using the toilet, changing nappies, touching animals, as well as before eating and preparing food.
- If you have campylobacteriosis, do not handle or prepare food for others while you have symptoms and for at least 24 hours after your symptoms have ended.

Do people need to be excluded from school or work?

People with *Campylobacter* infections should not attend childcare or school, or work in childcare or health care settings (including aged care facilities) until their diarrhoea has completely stopped. Food handlers should be excluded from work until they have been free of symptoms for at least 48 hours.

Need more information?

For more information on *Campylobacter* infections contact your doctor or call the Health Protection Service, Communicable Disease Control Information Line during business hours on (02) 6205 2155.

Communicable Disease Control Section at the Health Protection Service is responsible for the investigation and surveillance of notifiable or infectious conditions in the ACT in order to control or prevent their spread in the community. This includes the promotion of immunisation, education and other strategies that help to limit the spread of diseases.

Campylobacteriosis is a notifiable disease. Cases are notified to ACT Health.

Acknowledgements

Heymann DL, 2015, *Control of Communicable Diseases Manual*, 20th edition.

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