



Information on *Campylobacter* Public Information

What is *Campylobacter* infection?

Campylobacter infection, or campylobacteriosis, is caused by *Campylobacter* bacteria. It is the most common bacterial cause of diarrheal illness in the United States. Many more cases go undiagnosed or unreported. CDC estimates *Campylobacter* infection affects 1.5 million U.S. residents every year. Most cases are not part of recognized outbreaks, and more cases occur in summer than in winter.

What are the symptoms of *Campylobacter* infection?

People with *Campylobacter* infection usually have diarrhea (often bloody), fever, and stomach cramps. Nausea and vomiting may accompany the diarrhea. Symptoms usually start 2 to 5 days after infection and last about one week. Some people experience complications, such as irritable bowel syndrome, nerve damage, and arthritis. More severe illness can occur, such as bloodstream infection and symptoms that mimic acute appendicitis or ulcerative colitis.

How does food and water get contaminated with *Campylobacter*?

Campylobacter can contaminate food and water in several ways.

Many chickens, turkeys, cows, and other animals that show no signs of illness carry *Campylobacter*. *Campylobacter* can be carried

Infectious Disease Epidemiology Section
Office of Public Health, Louisiana Dept. of Health
1-800-256-2748

<http://ldh.la.gov/index.cfm/page/299>

in the intestines, liver, and other organs of animals and can be transferred to other edible parts when an animal is slaughtered.

Milk can become contaminated when a cow has a *Campylobacter* infection in her udder or when milk is contaminated with manure.

Pasteurization makes milk safe to drink.

Fruits and vegetables can be contaminated through contact with soil or water containing feces (poop) from cows, birds, or other animals. Animal feces can contaminate lakes and streams. Washing or scrubbing fruits and vegetables and disinfecting untreated drinking water helps prevent illness.

How do people get infected with *Campylobacter* bacteria?

It takes very few *Campylobacter* bacteria to make someone sick. A single drop of juice from raw chicken can contain enough bacteria to infect someone.

Campylobacter infections are commonly acquired by eating raw or undercooked poultry or eating something that touched it. *Campylobacter* are also transmitted by preparing raw or lightly cooked foods, including salad and fruits with knives or on cutting boards that were used with raw poultry, seafood, or meat; by contact with animals or their food, water, poop, belongings, or habitats; and by drinking untreated water.

Campylobacter does not usually spread from one person to another; it can spread from animals to humans. Outbreaks have been associated with poultry, raw (unpasteurized) dairy products, seafood, untreated water, produce, and pet store puppies.

How is *Campylobacter* diagnosed and treated?

Diagnosis

Campylobacter infection is diagnosed when a laboratory test detects *Campylobacter* bacteria in stool (poop), body tissue, or fluids. The test could be a culture that isolates the bacteria or a rapid diagnostic test that detects genetic material of the bacteria.

Treatment

Most people recover from *Campylobacter* infection without antibiotic treatment. Patients should drink extra fluids as long as diarrhea lasts.

Antibiotics are sometimes used to treat severe illness and in people at risk for severe illness. People at risk include children less than 5, adults 65 and older, people with weakened immune system, people who work with animals and international travelers.

Do infected people need to be isolated or excluded from work or school?

Generally infected people will continue to pass the germs in their feces for a few days to a week or more. Since the organism is passed in the feces, only people with active diarrhea who are unable to control their bowel habits (infants, young children, certain handicapped individuals) should be isolated.

Most infected people may return to school or work once their stools are formed provided that they carefully wash their hands after toilet visits. Special considerations must be given to food handlers, health care workers, and children in day care. Food handlers and healthcare workers should be excluded until symptoms have subsided. Infants in diapers preferably should not return to day care until they have received at least two days of antibiotic therapy or the diarrhea had subsided.

How can campylobacteriosis be prevented?

1. Always treat raw poultry, beef, and pork as if they are contaminated:

- Wrap fresh meats in plastic bags at the market to prevent blood from dripping on other foods.
- Refrigerate foods promptly.
- Cutting boards and counters used in the preparation should be washed immediately after use to avoid cross-contamination with other foods.
- Avoid eating raw or undercooked meats.
- Ensure that the correct internal cooking temperature is reached-especially when cooking with a microwave oven.

2. Avoid eating raw eggs or undercooking foods containing eggs.

3. Avoid drinking raw milk.

4. Encourage careful handwashing before and after food preparation.

5. Make sure to wash hands after handling pets.