

CAMPYLOBACTERIOSIS

What is campylobacteriosis?

Campylobacteriosis is an infection of the intestines, and in rare cases the bloodstream, caused by *Campylobacter* bacteria. Campylobacteriosis is the most commonly reported cause of diarrhea, including traveler's diarrhea, in all age groups.

People with weakened immune systems have an increased risk for infection and recurrences, more severe symptoms and a greater chance of being a chronic carrier of the bacteria. In Canada, most cases of campylobacteriosis happen in the summer and usually occur as single cases.

Symptoms of campylobacteriosis

Symptoms vary from mild to severe:

- Diarrhea (may have traces of blood or mucus in the stool)
- Abdominal pain
- Fever
- Nausea
- Vomiting
- A general feeling of being unwell

Symptoms generally appear two to five days after the exposure, with a range of one to 10 days after exposure. Relapse can occur. Some individuals can also be asymptomatic.

How does campylobacteriosis spread?

Campylobacter are frequently found in poultry and cattle. Puppies, kittens, other pets, pigs, sheep, rodents and birds may also be sources of infection. The bacteria can spread to humans through:

- Contact with infected animals, including pets and farm animals
- Eating raw or undercooked meat, especially poultry
- Eating foods that have been contaminated with *campylobacter* organisms from raw meat. This can happen during food preparation if you cut raw poultry on a cutting board and then use the unwashed board or utensil to prepare vegetables. Vegetables can also get contaminated, and if they are eaten without being cooked, they may cause illness
- Drinking unpasteurized milk or water contaminated with animal feces
- Person to person contact, if an infected person does not practice good handwashing, especially after using the bathroom

People with campylobacteriosis pass the bacteria in their feces for a few days and up to several weeks after becoming infected. Symptomatic food handlers, healthcare providers and day care staff or attendees should not attend work until symptom free for 24 hours or 48 hours after completion anti-diarrheal medications.

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Preventing campylobacteriosis

The most effective way to stop the spread of campylobacteriosis is practicing good hand hygiene. Wash hands frequently for at least 15 seconds, especially:

- After using the washroom
- After changing diapers
- Before preparing or eating food
- After contact with raw meat and before handling other foods

Additional ways to prevent infection include:

- Do not prepare food or handle water for others if you have diarrhea
- Prevent cross-contamination in the kitchen by cleaning all counter tops, utensils and cutting boards with soap and hot water after contact with raw meats and poultry, especially before using these areas to prepare ready-to-eat foods
- Cook meat, poultry and egg products thoroughly. Make sure any meat is cooked throughout (no longer pink) and juices run clear
- Use a thermometer to make sure that the correct internal cooking temperature is reached, particularly when using a microwave
- Keep cold foods cold at 4°C or lower and keep hot foods hot at 60°C or higher. Minimize the time that food is held at room temperature. Promptly refrigerate leftover food at 4°C or lower
- Drink only pasteurized milk. Never let children sample raw milk directly from an animal
- Drink water from a safe water supply. Have your well tested to ensure it is safe to drink
- Farms should ensure:
 - Thorough cleaning and disinfection
 - Good slaughtering and handling practices
 - Proper freezing of meats
 - Proper chemical carcass decontamination or irradiation

Treating campylobacteriosis

Treatment recommendations should be discussed with your attending health care provider. Most people infected with *Campylobacter* will recover without treatment. Infected people should drink plenty of fluids to prevent dehydration from diarrhea. Antibiotics are occasionally used to treat severe cases or shorten the duration of symptoms, if given early in the illness, which may be important for food handlers, children in daycare and health care workers.