

Gastroenteritis - campylobacter

Campylobacter infection is a type of gastroenteritis (gastro) caused by a bacteria known as *Campylobacter*. Symptoms usually develop two to five days after becoming infected with the bacteria. All age groups can be affected but infection is more common in children under five years of age and young adults. Elderly people and those with other medical conditions often develop more severe symptoms. Examination of a stool (faeces) sample will determine if you have the infection.

Common symptoms

The most common symptoms of Campylobacter infection are:

- Diarrhoea. (this may contain blood or mucous)
- Stomach cramps
- Fever
- Nausea and vomiting.

How you can become infected

Campylobacter bacteria are found in the faeces of many animals, including farm animals and household pets. People become infected when *Campylobacter* bacteria are taken in by mouth and this can happen by:

- Eating undercooked meat, especially chicken.
- Drinking unpasteurised milk or drinking water contaminated with *Campylobacter*.
- Eating cooked food, which has been cross-contaminated with *Campylobacter* bacteria from raw food.
- Handling infected animals and not washing hands afterwards.

The infection can also be spread from person to person when:

- People with Campylobacter bacteria in their faeces do not wash their hands properly after going to the toilet. Contaminated hands can then contaminate food which may be eaten by others and surfaces which may be touched by others.
- Hands become contaminated when changing the nappy of an infected infant.
People and animals can carry and spread the infection even if they don't have symptoms.

Contact your doctor if you think you are infected

It is very important to your doctor if you think you have Campylobacter infection. To find out if you have the infection, the doctor will arrange a stool (faeces) sample for testing. If the results of the tests show that you have Campylobacter infection, the doctor will provide advice and appropriate treatment and will notify the Department of Human Services.

Preventing the spread of *Campylobacter*

To prevent the spread of infection:

- Keep children home from school, child care or kindergarten until their symptoms have stopped.
- Do not go back to work until symptoms have stopped if you are a food handler, childcare or healthcare worker.
- Do not prepare or handle food until your symptoms have stopped.
- Do not share your towel or face washer with the infected person.
- Wash your hands with soap and hot running water after using the toilet, changing nappies and before preparing food.
- Clean bathrooms and other surfaces regularly.

Safe food storage and preparation

The risk of becoming infected with *Campylobacter* can be minimised by:

- Cooking all raw foods, especially meat, and washing raw vegetables properly.
- Storing food below 5 degrees Celsius or above 60 degrees Celsius to prevent the growth of bacteria.
- Washing tongs, knives and cutting boards between using them for raw foods and cooked or ready-to-eat foods.
- Ensuring the internal temperature of reheated foods reaches at least 75 degrees Celsius.
- Keeping all kitchen surfaces and equipment clean.

Children's sandpits

Children's sandpits can become contaminated with *Campylobacter* through animal faeces. Rake the sand regularly and remove any animal faeces. Cover the sandpit when it is not in use.

Where to get help

- Your doctor
- Your local council's health department
- Department of Human Services, Communicable Disease Control Tel. (03) 9096 5354

Things to remember

- *Campylobacter* infection is a type of gastro caused by a bacteria.
- Many healthy animals can carry *Campylobacter* bacteria in their faeces and spread the infection to humans.
- Safe food handling and through handwashing can help prevent *Campylobacter* infection.

This page has been produced in consultation with, and approved by:

DHS - Communicable Disease Control

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