
Gastroenteritis - campylobacteriosis

Summary

- Campylobacteriosis is a type of gastroenteritis caused by the *Campylobacter* bacteria.
 - Many healthy animals can carry *Campylobacter* bacteria in their faeces and spread the infection to humans.
 - Safe food handling and thorough handwashing can help prevent campylobacteriosis.
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Campylobacteriosis 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 faeces (poo) sample will determine if you have the infection.

Symptoms of campylobacteriosis

The most common symptoms of campylobacteriosis are:

- diarrhoea (this may contain blood or mucous)
- stomach cramps
- fever
- nausea and vomiting.

Causes of campylobacteriosis

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. 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.

Diagnosis of campylobacteriosis

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

Prevention of campylobacteriosis

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 °C or above 60 °C 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
- making sure the internal temperature of reheated foods reaches at least 75 °C
- 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 **GP (doctor)**
- Your local council health department
- **Communicable Disease Epidemiology and Surveillance Unit, Department of Health and Human Services**, Victorian Government Tel. **1300 651 160**

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

Department of Health and Human Services - RHP&R - Health Protection - Communicable Disease Prevention and Control Unit

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