



Campylobacteriosis

What is Campylobacteriosis?

Campylobacteriosis is an infection caused by *Campylobacter* bacteria, which are commonly found in the intestinal tracts of animals, especially cattle and poultry. Most cases are associated with eating raw or undercooked poultry or cross contamination of other foods with these items. Some people have gotten the infection from the stool of an ill dog or cat. *Campylobacter jejuni* is the strain of bacteria associated with most human infections and is one of the most common causes of diarrheal illness in the United States.

How is it spread?

Campylobacter bacteria pass through the feces (stool) of animals into the environment and water sources, such as streams and ponds. Humans can come in contact with *Campylobacter* or other bacteria by:

- Eating undercooked meat or poultry.
- Drinking contaminated (nonchlorinated or untreated) water.
- Drinking unpasteurized milk and fruit juices.
- Petting animals, especially puppies, kittens and farm animals because fecal matter on an animal's coat may be transmitted to human hands.
- Contact with fecal matter of an ill dog or cat.
- Improper cleaning of cutting boards after preparing raw meat or poultry.
- Improper handwashing after bathroom use or diapering an infant.

What are the symptoms?

Symptoms usually occur within two to five days after ingesting the bacteria and include fever, abdominal cramps and diarrhea (sometimes bloody), accompanied by nausea and vomiting. Some people who are infected with *Campylobacter* do not have any symptoms at all, but can spread the bacteria to others. In people with compromised immune systems, *Campylobacter* occasionally spreads to the bloodstream and causes a serious life-threatening infection.

Some people may develop a rare disease that affects the nerves of the body beginning several weeks after the diarrheal illness. This disease, called Guillain-Barré syndrome, occurs when a person's immune system is "triggered" to attack the body's own nerves, can lead to paralysis that lasts several weeks and usually requires intensive care. It is estimated that approximately one in every 1000 reported campylobacteriosis cases leads to Guillain-Barré syndrome. As many as 40% of Guillain-Barré syndrome cases in this country may be triggered by campylobacteriosis.

How is it diagnosed?

Diagnosis of *Campylobacter* requires laboratory cultures of a stool sample from the ill person.

How is it treated?

Virtually all persons infected with *Campylobacter* will recover completely within seven to ten days without any specific treatment. People with diarrhea should drink plenty of fluids as long as symptoms last. In the most severe cases, antibiotics can be used and may shorten the duration of symptoms.

How is it prevented?

To minimize the risk of illness:

- Follow the principles of safe food handling:
 - Thoroughly cook meat and poultry to proper internal temperatures (ground meat – at least 155° F for 15 seconds; poultry – at least 165°F for 15 seconds; other meats – follow package instructions).
 - Prompt refrigeration or freezing. Freeze raw meat and poultry within one or two days.
 - Thaw foods in the refrigerator, never at room temperature.
 - Prevent cross-contamination of foods by thoroughly washing hands, cutting boards (preferably plastic, not wooden) and utensils after contact with raw meat and poultry.
- Do not drink untreated water from streams, lakes or ponds.
- Do not drink unpasteurized milk or fruit juices.
- Thoroughly wash hands after handling animals or pets.
- Practice good personal hygiene, especially thorough and frequent handwashing.

How does it affect my family? my pets?

Safe food handling should always be practiced in order to protect family members from *Campylobacter* and other bacterial illnesses. Pets should be properly protected through appropriate care and immunizations. Children should be taught to thoroughly wash their hands after handling any pet or other animal.

For more information call the Guilford County Department of Health and Human Services, Public Health Division at 336-641-7777, visit our website at www.guilfordhealth.org, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) website at www.cdc.gov or the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) website at www.fda.gov