

Campylobacter



What is campylobacter?

Campylobacter bacteria cause food poisoning. Symptoms include diarrhoea, vomiting, stomach pains and cramps, fever, and generally feeling unwell. It is the commonest cause of food poisoning in Britain.

Who gets campylobacter?

Anyone can get campylobacter, but young children under 5 years of age, those over 60 and people who work with farm animals or in the meat industry, and travellers to developing countries are at greater risk.

How do you get infected with campylobacter?

You usually get infected by eating contaminated food. Campylobacter is found in most raw poultry and is common in raw meat. Mushrooms and shellfish can also be contaminated but this is unusual. Avoid storing raw and cooked foods together and don't use the same work surfaces, or utensils when preparing raw and cooked food. You can also get campylobacter from infected pets and other animals.

It is impossible to tell from its appearance whether food is contaminated with campylobacter. It will look, smell and taste normal so correct handling and cooking are very important.

How can you avoid getting infected with campylobacter?

- Wash your hands thoroughly with soap and warm water:
 - before preparing and eating food
 - after handling raw food
 - after going to the toilet or changing a baby's nappy
 - after contact with pets and other animals
 - after working in the garden
- Keep cooked food away from raw food
- Store raw foods below cooked or ready-to-eat foods in the fridge to prevent contamination.
- Cook food thoroughly, especially meat, so that it is piping hot, as this will destroy any campylobacter
- Keep all kitchen surfaces and equipment including knives, chopping boards, and dish cloths clean
- Do not drink untreated water from lakes, rivers or streams
- You should pay special attention to hygiene during farm visits, washing hands after any contact with animals, and eating only in designated areas
- If someone has campylobacter put all dirty clothes, bedding and towels on the hottest cycle of the washing machine possible. Clean toilet seats, toilet bowls, flush handles, taps and wash hand basins after use with detergent and hot water, followed by a household disinfectant

What are the symptoms of campylobacter and how long do they last?

Symptoms include diarrhoea, vomiting, stomach pains and cramps, fever, and generally feeling unwell. They usually develop within two to five days, but can take as long as 10 days. Most cases start to clear up after two to three days of diarrhoea and from 80 to 90 per cent settle within one week.

How do you treat campylobacter?

Most people who have campylobacter recover without treatment within two to five days, although it can sometimes take up to 10 days to get better. It is important to drink plenty of fluids as diarrhoea or vomiting can lead to dehydration and you can lose important sugars and minerals from your body. Your doctor may recommend a re-hydration solution, available from your pharmacist.

- If you feel sick, try taking small sips of fluid, frequently
- Avoid tea, coffee, carbonated drinks or alcohol
- Always dilute sugary drinks even if you would not normally dilute them
- A simple painkiller like paracetamol can help combat any pain

If the infection is very severe you may be given antibiotics. If you are given antibiotics it is essential that you complete the course as prescribed.

Do you need to stay off work or school?

Yes. While you are ill and have symptoms you are infectious. You can return to work or school once you have been free from diarrhoea for 48 hours.

You should tell your employer you have had campylobacter infection if you work with vulnerable groups such as the elderly, the young, those in poor health, or handle food.

The Health Protection Agency and campylobacter

We provide advice on controlling outbreaks. We look for the source of the infection; for example the food that is responsible, so that we can help to prevent other people from becoming infected. We also monitor outbreaks of campylobacter and look for any patterns or trends which show possible connections between the people who are affected.

More information about the Health Protection Agency and campylobacter is available on our website at <http://www.hpa.org.uk>

If you have concerns about your health contact NHS Direct on 0845 4647, visit their website <http://www.nhsdirect.nhs.uk>, or see your family doctor.

If you have any further questions,
please contact

Health Protection Agency

Centre for Infections
61 Colindale Avenue
London
NW9 5EQ
Tel 020 8200 4400
Fax 020 8205 9185
www.hpa.org.uk

October 2006
© Health Protection Agency