

Campylobacter

Disease Fact Sheet

What is campylobacter?

Campylobacter is a bacteria that can cause an intestinal illness in people and animals. *Campylobacter jejuni* is the species most frequently involved in illnesses, but other species of *Campylobacter* may also cause illness.

What are the symptoms?

Typical symptoms are diarrhea (sometimes bloody), abdominal pain, fever, fatigue, headache, nausea and vomiting. Symptoms usually last 2-10 days, and symptoms sometimes recur. Not all infected persons show signs and symptoms. About 1 in 1,000 persons infected with *Campylobacter* develops a serious condition called Guillain-Barre Syndrome (GBS). GBS causes limb weakness, sometimes progressing to paralysis. At least 30-40% of cases of GBS are probably caused by *Campylobacter* infection.

How soon do symptoms appear?

The incubation period can range from 1 to 10 days, but is usually 2 to 5 days.

How do you get it?

Campylobacter is transmitted by fecal-->oral spread. The bacteria is shed in the feces (stools) of people and animals infected with *Campylobacter*. You can get *Campylobacter* by eating food or drinking beverages that have been contaminated with feces from infected people or animals. You can also get it if you contaminate your own hands cleaning up animal droppings or handling raw poultry and meat, then eating with your hands or putting your hands in your mouth. The bacteria may be spread within the family unit and between small children.

Campylobacter is present on most uncooked poultry, sometimes in beef, pork, unpasteurized dairy products, and unchlorinated water. The bacteria can be present in a wide variety of animal droppings including mammals (puppies, kittens, cows, and pigs) and birds (chickens, turkeys and wild birds). Adequate cooking destroys the bacteria.

Campylobacter is NOT spread by coughing or sneezing.

How do you find out if you have it?

Your doctor can order a stool culture test in which the bacteria is grown from a sample of your feces. An infected person will shed the bacteria while they are ill and for several days to weeks after they recover and no longer have symptoms.

How is it treated?

No specific treatment is indicated for mild infections, except bedrest and fluid replacement. Appropriate antibiotics may eliminate the bacteria, but may not shorten the duration of symptoms.

How can you keep from getting it?

- * Cook poultry and meats adequately.
- * Take care when handling uncooked poultry or meat--don't lick your fingers or smoke a cigarette; wash your hands first; wash the cutting board thoroughly before cutting anything else on it.
- * Keep poultry and meat refrigerated.
- * Don't drink untreated water (stream, lake, etc.).
- * Don't drink raw milk, or eat unpasteurized dairy products.
- * Wash your hands after changing diapers.
- * Keep children away from animal droppings.
- * Wash hands after handling pets or cleaning pet cages.

How can you keep from spreading it if you have it?

WASH YOUR HANDS--after going to the bathroom, before fixing food, before wiping children's faces. Ill persons should not prepare food if it can be avoided.