

Campylobacteriosis

Public Health – Factsheet

What is campylobacteriosis (kam - pie - low - bak – ter/ee – oh – sis)?

Campylobacteriosis is an intestinal* illness caused by a bacteria, or germ, called a Campylobacter.

What are the symptoms of campylobacteriosis?

Common symptoms are diarrhea (often bloody), stomach pain, weakness, nausea and vomiting.

It's important to know that in newborn babies, and young infants, bloody diarrhea may be the only symptom. In older children and adults, symptoms may feel like acute appendicitis or inflammatory bowel disease. Others can be infected and not have any symptoms at all.

Serious illness from campylobacteriosis is rare.

When do the symptoms start and how long do they last?

Symptoms usually begin two to 14 days after becoming infected. They can last anywhere from two to five days. Sometimes people will have flu-like symptoms 12 to 24 hours before the onset of the other symptoms described above.

What causes campylobacteriosis?

Campylobacteriosis is usually caused by eating undercooked meat and poultry, or by drinking contaminated water or raw milk. As well, people travelling to developing countries are more at risk of getting campylobacteriosis.

How is campylobacteriosis spread?

Although rare, the germ can be spread directly from person to person by the fecal-oral route, a form of disease transmission where someone becomes infected by touching and ingesting the feces (poop) of infected people or animals (including pets and farm animals), without following up with proper hand washing. It is especially common in very young children and occurs when toddlers don't wash their hands after pooping – then put their fingers in their mouths. The disease is more common in summer than in winter.

What should you do if you think you have campylobacteriosis?

If you think you have campylobacteriosis, you should see your doctor for testing, advice and treatment.

How is campylobacteriosis diagnosed?

You have the disease when Campylobacter bacteria are found in your stool (poop). Sometimes the bacteria can be found in the blood as well. A sample of your stool must be sent to a lab, which uses special methods to grow and identify the bacteria.

How is the infection treated?

Most people will recover without treatment. Your doctor will decide if treatment is necessary in your particular case.

People with campylobacteriosis should drink plenty of clear fluids (ex: water, clear juices, soups) to prevent dehydration caused by the diarrhea. Resting and eating foods that are easy to digest (ex: bananas, rice, crackers) will help recovery. The use of over-the-counter medicine to stop diarrhea (ex: Immodium) is **not** recommended.

How can I protect myself from campylobacteriosis?

Here are some ways to reduce your chances of getting campylobacteriosis:

- Wash your hands with soap and water before and after:
 - using the toilet
 - changing diapers
 - eating or preparing food
 - handling animals (pets, farm animals or wild animals)
- Teach young children how to wash their hands properly with soap and water. Supervise children, depending on their age, to make sure they're washing their hands correctly.

* an illness of the stomach or bowels

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- Supervise young children who have contact with animals (ex: petting zoo) to make sure they don't put their hands in their mouths.
- Teach young children not to touch animals that look sick.
- Avoid eating beef, pork or poultry that has not been thoroughly cooked.
- Avoid eating runny eggs.
- Avoid consuming raw or unpasteurized milk or other raw milk products.
- Always drink water you know is safe. This includes water that is bottled, treated or boiled.

Consider Others

Don't pass it on.

If I become infected, how can I avoid passing on campylobacteriosis to others?

If you become ill with campylobacteriosis, you should stop working while you have diarrhea and vomiting. It is recommended you don't go back to work until 48 hours (two days) after your last diarrhea or vomiting incident. This will give you a chance to recover and will reduce the risk of passing the infection to others.

All people with campylobacteriosis should wash their hands frequently. This is especially important after going to the toilet and before handling food. It is important to realize you can make others sick.

Are there certain jobs where the bacteria can be passed on more easily?

Yes. If you work in a job that involves food handling or close contact with others (ex: kitchens or restaurants, hospitals, daycares, personal care homes) and you become ill with campylobacteriosis, it is especially important that you not return to work until at least 48 hours after your last diarrhea or vomiting incident.

What about daycare? If my child becomes infected with campylobacteriosis, can I send him/her anyway?

If your child has the illness, it is recommended that he/she not go to daycare during this time. If this is not possible, the child should be cared for in a separate area of the daycare, until the diarrhea has stopped.

For more information

Talk to your doctor or other health care provider, your local public health unit, or call Health Links-Info Santé at 204-788-8200 in Winnipeg; or toll free 1-888-315-9257 outside Winnipeg.

Information is also available on the Manitoba Health website at www.gov.mb.ca/health/publichealth/cdc/protocol/campylobacteriosis.pdf.