
What is Campylobacter?

Campylobacter is a germ that lives harmlessly in the gut of many animals & birds. It infects the gut of humans and is a common cause of diarrhoea in people of all ages. The disease is present all the year round but tends to be more common late spring and early summer.

What are the symptoms?

The time taken from picking up *Campylobacter* to becoming ill is usually between 2 and 5 days but can be as long as 11 days. Illness (symptoms) usually takes the form of:

- ❖ Diarrhoea – sometimes with blood; Abdominal (tummy) pain; Fever; Nausea (feeling sick) and/or vomiting; General tiredness

These symptoms usually clear up within 4 – 7 days but a small number of people take weeks to recover fully.

How does it spread?

The commonest route is by eating contaminated food. Raw (unpasteurised) milk poses a risk. Germs are found on uncooked meats (especially chicken) and can be spread by using knives and utensils such as chopping boards for both raw & cooked foods. Contact with infected animals & birds both farm and domestic (especially young animals under 6 months of age) carries a risk of infection. Birdfeeders & pecked top milk bottles could be a source of infection. Infected children can pass the infection to puppies and kittens, which in turn can infect other children. An infected person may contaminate foodstuffs by poor hand hygiene practice.

Can it be prevented?

The risk of spreading *Campylobacter* will be reduced if you practice the following:

1. Wash hands carefully & thoroughly

After: handling animals; changing nappies; visiting the toilet; *and before:* cooking; handling food; feeding the young or elderly; eating

2. Prepare food safely

- ❖ Clean food preparation surfaces with detergent and warm water
- ❖ Do not use the same chopping board/knife for raw meat or other foodstuffs without washing thoroughly
- ❖ Defrost poultry, meat and other meat products well before cooking
- ❖ Cook until the juices run clear and there are no pink bits inside
- ❖ Follow manufacturers instructions
- ❖ Remember cooked meat is stored at the top of the fridge and uncooked meat at the bottom
- ❖ Eat cooked food immediately or cool quickly and place in fridge or freezer
- ❖ Run the fridge at 5°C or below
- ❖ Re-heated foods should be piping hot
- ❖ Avoid drinking milk from bottles with tops pecked by birds
- ❖ Try to keep pets out of the kitchen
- ❖ Lastly, thoroughly wash all salad vegetables

3. Thoroughly cook food

Campylobacter is destroyed by heat. Ensure all meat (especially poultry) is thoroughly cooked.

4. Eating raw eggs

Foods that contain raw eggs along with eating eggs with runny yolks can sometimes cause food poisoning. Avoid 'raw' dairy products. Unpasteurised milk is risky.

5. Drink only treated water

Where possible avoid drinking untreated water from rivers and streams. Consider using previously boiled water for drinks and tooth brushing with unchecked private water supplies.

Will I need treatment?

Generally individuals with *Campylobacter* do not require treatment. They usually only need to take care to drink plenty water or other clear fluids.

The germ may take 2 to 7 weeks to clear out of the body so care should be taken not to infect others during this period – especially when there is still diarrhoea. 'Probiotic' drinks or foods (such as live yoghurt) can help to replace and restore the balance of 'good' bacteria in the gut.

The GP should be contacted if symptoms become severe. Antibiotics may be prescribed in exceptional circumstances.

In most cases it is generally advised to wait until 48 hours after last having diarrhoea or sickness before returning to work or school/nursery.

Is there anything else?

This infection can only be controlled if we better understand how it was passed on. This may help to stop others getting infected. Your help with this is important.

A nurse or doctor from the Public Health Department or an Environmental Health Officer may be in touch to find out more information about the time leading up to the illness. They will want to know about who else may be at risk.

Need further advice or information?

- ❖ NHS Inform www.nhsinform.co.uk
- ❖ NHS24 ☎ 111 www.nhs24.co.uk
- ❖ www.nhsborders.scot.nhs.uk
- ❖ Local health clinic or GP

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