

CAMPYLOBACTER

What is Campylobacteriosis?

Campylobacteriosis is an infectious disease caused by bacteria of the genus *Campylobacter*. Most people who become ill with campylobacteriosis get diarrhoea, cramping, abdominal pain and fever within 2 to 5 days after exposure to the organism. The diarrhoea may be bloody and can be accompanied by nausea and vomiting. The illness typically lasts one week. Some people who are infected with *Campylobacter* do not have any symptoms at all. In people with compromised immune systems, *Campylobacter* occasionally spreads to the bloodstream and causes a serious life-threatening infection.

Infection and Source of Infection in Animals

Many animals including pigs, cattle, dogs, cats and birds – particularly poultry – carry the bacteria in their intestines. These sources may cause contamination of meat products, particularly poultry, water supplies, milk and other items which are in the food chain.

Diagnosis in Animals

Animals infected with *Campylobacter* may not show any signs of infection and are, therefore, difficult to identify.

Campylobacter and Humans

Campylobacter is generally spread by eating or drinking contaminated food or water, unpasteurised milk and by direct or indirect contact with faecal material from an infected person, animal, bird or pet (especially puppies and kittens). The symptoms usually appear 2 - 5 days after the exposure with a range of 1-10 days after exposure.

Diagnosis in Humans

Many different kinds of infections can cause diarrhoea and bloody diarrhoea. Diagnosis of *Campylobacter* requires special laboratory culture procedures, which doctors may need to specifically request.

Treatment and Prevention in Humans

Virtually all people infected with *Campylobacter* will recover without any specific treatment. Patients should drink plenty of fluids for as long as the diarrhoea lasts. In more severe cases, antibiotics can be used, and can shorten the duration of symptoms if they are given early in the illness.

To prevent *Campylobacter* infection:

- Always treat raw poultry, beef and pork as if they are contaminated and handle accordingly:
 - Promptly refrigerate foods, minimise holding time at room temperature
 - Cutting boards and counters used for food preparation should be washed and disinfected immediately after use to prevent cross-contamination with other foods
 - Avoid eating raw or undercooked meats
 - Ensure that the correct internal cooking temperature is reached, particularly when using a microwave
- Avoid eating raw eggs or undercooking foods containing raw eggs
- Avoid consuming unpasteurised or raw milk or unchlorinated water
- Carefully wash hands with soap and water before and after food preparation
- Recognise, control and prevent *Campylobacter* infection in domestic animals and pets
- Always wash hands with soap and water after handling animals

Conclusion

By ensuring proper hygiene measures and preparing raw meats, especially poultry with care, *Campylobacter* infections can be avoided.

Pets are Good for People

Pets provide us with loyalty, companionship, love and affection, as well as the many physical and psychological benefits. The least we can do to repay this is to ensure that we keep them in the best of health. A healthy pet is a happy pet and a happy pet can help us enjoy a much fuller and more rewarding life.

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For further information, please contact the Pet Health Council on:

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