

CAMPYLOBACTER

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What is campylobacteriosis?

Campylobacteriosis is a bacterial infection that affects the intestinal tract and, rarely, the bloodstream. Most cases are seen in the summer months and can occur as single cases or outbreaks.

Who gets campylobacteriosis?

Anyone can get campylobacteriosis but those with compromised immune systems are at risk for more serious infection.

How is the germ spread?

Campylobacteriosis is acquired by eating undercooked chicken or pork and/or other food or drink that is contaminated with this organism. Even one drop of juice from a piece of raw infected chicken or pork can make a person ill. Animals can become infected and humans have acquired the infection through their pets. Occasionally it is spread from person to person contact.

What are the symptoms of campylobacteriosis?

Campylobacteriosis may cause mild or severe diarrhea, often with fever, abdominal cramps and traces of blood in the stool.

How soon after exposure do symptoms appear?

The symptoms generally appear two to five days after the exposure.

Where are the campylobacter germs found?

Many animals including pigs, cattle dogs and birds (particularly poultry) carry the germ in their intestines. These sources in turn may contaminate meat products (particularly poultry), water supplies, milk and other items in the food chain.

For how long can a person carry the campylobacter germ?

Generally infected people will continue to pass the germ in their feces for a few days to a week or more. Certain antibiotics may shorten the carrier phase.

Do infected people need to be isolated or excluded from school or work?

Since the organism is passed in the feces, only people with active diarrhea who are unable to control their bowel movements (infants, young children, certain handicapped individuals, for example) should be isolated. Most infected people may return to work or school when their stools become formed provided that they carefully wash their hands after toilet visits. Food handlers, children in day care and health care workers may need the approval of the local or state health department before returning to their work activities.

What is the treatment for campylobacteriosis?

Most people infected with campylobacter will recover on their own and may require fluids to prevent dehydration. Antibiotics are occasionally used to treat severe cases or and may shorten the duration of the symptoms if given early in the illness. Your physician will decide if antibiotics are necessary.

How can campylobacteriosis be prevented?

Always treat raw poultry, beef and pork as if they are contaminated and handle accordingly:

- Wrap fresh meats in plastic bags at the market to prevent blood from dripping on other foods.
- Refrigerate foods promptly; minimize holding at room temperature.
- Cutting boards and counters used for preparation should be washed immediately in hot soapy water after use to prevent cross-contamination with other foods.
- Avoid eating raw or undercooked meats. Cook meat thoroughly until juice run clear.
- 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 using raw or unpasteurized milk or drinking untreated surface water
- Encourage careful hand washing **before** and **after** food preparation.
- Wash hands thoroughly with soap and water after contact with pet feces.

Want more information? Information on this disease and many other healthcare topics can be found at the Centers for Disease Control website www.cdc.gov and search under health topics A-Z.

