

F a c t s

CAMPYLOBACTER

What is it?

Campylobacter bacteria are a common cause of diarrhea in humans. The disease is characterized by diarrhea, abdominal pain, malaise, fever, nausea, and vomiting. The diarrhea may sometimes be bloody. The symptoms typically appear within 3-5 days after exposure to the bacteria and the illness usually lasts for 2-5 days. However, more serious episodes can last as long as 10 days.

How do I know I have it?

Diagnosis is made from a stool culture. The bacteria can be spread to other people through food and poor hand washing practices as long as the bacteria are in the feces. Therefore, it is important to submit follow-up stool samples to make sure it is gone.

Where does it come from?

Campylobacter bacteria are found in animals and birds including fowl, cattle, swine, sheep, dogs, and cats. The bacteria can be spread through direct contact with animals, especially puppies, kittens and fowl. Direct contact with manure in a barn is a possible source. That is, contamination of the hands and then subsequently putting the fingers directly to the mouth or contaminating an object that is then put into the mouth. The bacteria must be swallowed to cause illness.

Campylobacter infection can be spread through contaminated food or drink, especially contaminated water and unpasteurized milk. Certain conditions make it easy for the bacteria to grow. Keeping hazardous foods such as meats unrefrigerated allows the bacteria to multiply. Fewer organisms can cause illness in young children and the elderly which makes them higher risk.

How do you prevent Campylobacter infection?

- Thorough hand washing is the best prevention. Make sure hands are properly washed after using the toilet, handling pets and before preparing foods.
- Clean and sanitize counter tops and utensils immediately after the preparation of foods, especially meats and poultry.
- Do not drink unpasteurized milk.

—Health & Environment Facts —

- Store and serve foods out of the "Danger Zone" (at or below 4°C/40°F or above 60°C/140°F).
- Make sure dairy products, meats and poultry are properly refrigerated.
- Cook poultry and meat thoroughly to an internal temperature of 74°C.
- Drink water from a safe water supply.
- Avoid preparing or handling food if you have diarrhea.
- Minimize contact with poultry and their feces and wash hands thoroughly when contact cannot be avoided.
- Puppies and kittens with diarrhea are possible sources of infection and infected children can transmit the infection to puppies and kittens, which may then expose other children.
- Handle the diapers of infected infants with extreme caution ensuring that proper hand washing takes place with both the child and the caregiver. The diapering area should be sanitized after each use.

For more information contact Public Health at (519) 376-9420 or 1-800-263-3456.