

Campylobacteriosis

What is Campylobacteriosis?

Campylobacteriosis (cam-py-lo-bac-teer-ee-o-sis) is a disease caused by bacteria called Campylobacter. Campylobacter infect the intestinal tract and sometimes the blood. There are 16 species and six subspecies assigned to the genus Campylobacter, of which the most frequently reported in human disease are *C. jejuni* and *C. coli*.

What are the symptoms of Campylobacteriosis?

Campylobacter infection may cause a variety of symptoms, including:

- mild to severe diarrhea
- bloody diarrhea
- stomach pain
- cramps
- nausea and/or vomiting
- fever
- headache
- muscle pain

Persons infected with *Campylobacter* bacteria may not exhibit any symptoms. These asymptomatic individuals can still pass the disease on to others.

Symptoms of campylobacteriosis usually begin two to five days after exposure, but it can also be as little as one day or as long as 10 days. The symptoms generally last three to six days, although occasionally they may last longer.

Rarely, arthritis, meningitis, septicemia, urinary tract infections and Guillain-Barré Syndrome can occur after campylobacteriosis.

If you have any signs and symptoms of illness, and you have exposure to possible sources of *Campylobacter* bacteria, contact your physician.

How is Campylobacteriosis spread?

- *Campylobacter* bacteria live in the intestines of many animals including chickens, cows, pigs, sheep, dogs, cats and infected humans, and are shed through feces. Raw meat of infected animals can become contaminated during slaughtering.
- The most common route of transmission is generally believed to be by ingestion of undercooked meats and meat products, as well as raw/unpasteurized or contaminated milk. The consumption of contaminated water or ice is also a recognized source of infection.
- An infant or child can be infected if a parent or caretaker handles contaminated food, such as raw meat, and does not wash hands adequately before handling the infant or child, their food, bottles, pacifiers or toys.

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Infections

- Coming in contact with the feces of infected humans or infected pets and not practicing good hand hygiene (e.g. hand washing) following the contact. Good hand washing includes using soap and water for at least 15 seconds.
- Eating food that has been cross-contaminated during preparation. In the kitchen, bacteria can be transmitted from contaminated foods to other foods, either directly, or through contamination of surfaces or utensils. For example, if you put raw meat on a surface or in a container and then place ready-to-eat food items on the same surface without first washing and sanitizing the surface, you can transfer bacteria from the raw meat to the surface and then to the ready-to-eat food.

How is Campylobacteriosis diagnosed?

Campylobacteriosis is usually diagnosed through detection of *Campylobacter* bacteria in the stool. Your physician can order a stool test for you. An infected person will release the bacteria in their stool while they are ill and for several days to weeks after symptoms subside.

How can you prevent Campylobacteriosis?

- Wash your hands with soap and water for at least 15 seconds:
 - after using the toilet
 - after changing diapers
 - after assisting others with the toilet
 - after contact with animals and their feces
 - after working in the garden
 - before eating
 - before handling food and after handling raw meat.
- Cook all meat thoroughly.
- *Handle food safely*: use separate cutting boards for raw meat and ready-to-eat food. Clean and sanitize all cutting boards, countertops, and utensils after preparing raw meat.
- Do not drink or eat raw/unpasteurized milk and milk products.
- Avoid swallowing water while swimming in lakes, rivers or pools.
- Avoid drinking water from shallow wells, rivers, lakes or streams. Only drink water that you know is uncontaminated. If you are not sure, treat the water yourself, for example, by boiling for at least five minutes.
- Food handlers, health care workers or those working in or attending a day care can transmit campylobacter to others in these settings. If you work in or attend one of these high-risk settings, you should stay home from work while you have diarrhea or vomiting and do not return to work until 48 hours after your last loose stool or episode of vomiting.

What causes Campylobacteriosis outbreaks?

Outbreaks have been associated with undercooked poultry, unpasteurized milk and milk products and non-chlorinated water.

This fact sheet provides basic information only. It must not take the place of medical advice, diagnosis or treatment. Always talk to a health care professional about any health concerns.

Source: Ontario Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care, Public Health Division.

**For further information contact the Infectious Disease Program at 625-8318
or toll free 1-888-294-6630, ext. 8318.**