



## FACT SHEET

### Campylobacter Infection

Campylobacteriosis is an infection of the gastrointestinal tract. It occurs most often during the warm months (May through October), causing sporadic illness.

**Cause:** *Campylobacter* bacteria.

**Symptoms:** Symptoms range from none to illness including diarrhea (which may be bloody), nausea and vomiting, abdominal cramps, and fever. The illness usually lasts 2 to 5 days -- rarely over 10 days. Upon recovery, the bacteria continue to be shed in the stool for a few days to two months, if not treated with antibiotics.

**Spread:** The primary source of infection is chronically infected poultry (especially chicken) and other animals. Most raw poultry meat is contaminated with *Campylobacter*. Other animals such as cattle, swine, and dogs carry the bacteria in their intestines. Person to person spread can occur by eating or drinking food or water that has been contaminated by the feces (stool) of an infected person/animal; this can spread the bacteria. Good hand washing is most important. Unpasteurized milk/juice can also be a source of infection. *Campylobacter* can be a cause of diarrhea in puppies and kittens.

**Incubation:** Symptoms generally appear three to five days after exposure, with a range of 1 to 10 days after exposure.

**Contagious Period:** Since the organism is passed in the stool, only persons who cannot control their bowel habits (i.e., infants and young children and certain individuals with disabilities) should be isolated. Most persons can return to work or school after their diarrhea ceases, provided they carefully wash their hands after using the restroom. Food handlers, people who attend or work in a child care facility, and health care workers, should have stool cultures repeated after completing antibiotic therapy to ensure the organism is not present in the stool.

**Precautions:** Hand washing is the single most effective way to prevent the spread of infections. Be sure to wash hands well with warm soapy water after handling raw meat, washing cutting boards and after contact with feces of dogs, cats, and especially stool of puppies and kittens with diarrhea.

**Prevention:**

1. Always treat raw meat as if it is 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 after use to prevent cross contamination of other food items.
  - Avoid eating raw or undercooked meats.
  - Ensure that the correct internal cooking temperature is reached, especially when using a microwave.
2. Avoid eating raw eggs or undercooked foods containing raw eggs.
  3. Avoid using unpasteurized milk.
  4. Carefully wash hands with warm, soapy water before and after food preparation.
  5. Wash hands with warm, soapy water after playing with pets.
  6. Recognize and control *Campylobacter* infections in pets.
  7. Always wash hands with warm, soapy water after using the restroom.

**Diagnosis and  
Treatment:**

A laboratory stool culture will detect the bacteria.

Most people will recover without antibiotic therapy. For most symptomatic persons, drinking plenty of fluids to prevent dehydration is all that is necessary. People with severe illness may need antibiotic therapy. Antibiotics may also be necessary to shorten the carrier state, especially in food handlers, people who attend or work in a child care facility, and health care workers. Since relapse of symptoms occasionally occurs, some physicians may treat the infected person with antibiotics to prevent relapses.