

Campylobacter Foodborne Illness

1. What is *Campylobacter* foodborne illness?

Well recognized as a cause of “food poisoning” or “foodborne disease”, *Campylobacter* (kam-pi-lo-BAK-ter) is an infective type of bacteria that can cause illness when ingested.

2. What are the symptoms?

This infection can cause:

- diarrhea (may be bloody)
- stomach cramps (may feel like appendicitis)
- malaise (sick feeling)
- fever
- nausea, and
- vomiting.



Symptoms often begin two to five days after ingesting the bacteria. The illness often lasts between two to five days, but usually no more than 10 days. An infected person can pass the bacteria in his/her feces for two to seven weeks, even after the symptoms are gone.

3. How do I know if I have this illness?

If you have the above symptoms, you should see your family doctor, who can arrange to have your stool sample tested. If you think food may have made you sick, call one of the offices listed below.

4. How does it spread?

The bacteria can be found in poultry and cattle, and sometimes in puppies, kittens, other pets, pigs, sheep, rodents, and birds. People can get the bacteria by:

- eating food or water that has come into contact with the bacteria, like:
 - ▶ food or untreated water that has come into contact with animal feces
 - ▶ undercooked meats
 - ▶ raw (non-pasteurized) milk
 - ▶ foods that have come into contact with dirty surfaces (such as unwashed cutting boards)

- touching pets and farm animals, or
- changing diapers of infants infected with the bacteria, without proper handwashing.

5. How is it treated?

Most people who become sick with *Campylobacter* will get better on their own. People with diarrhea and vomiting must drink plenty of fluids to prevent dehydration. Antibiotics are sometimes used to treat severe cases, or workers infected with the bacteria, so they may return to work earlier by shortening the time they can spread the disease to others.

6. How can I keep from getting this illness?

- Wash your hands with soap and water before handling foods and eating.
- Wash your hands with soap and water after:
 - ▶ handling raw meats
 - ▶ handling pets
 - ▶ changing diapers
 - ▶ using the toilet
- Handle raw meats carefully:
 - ▶ Store raw meats below ready-to-eat foods.
 - ▶ Wash cutting boards and counters right away after they touch raw poultry and meats.
 - ▶ Avoid eating raw or undercooked poultry and meats (see reverse).
- Avoid raw (non-pasteurized) milk and dairy products.
- Chill foods promptly to 4° C (40° F) or less to prevent the growth of bacteria.



7. How soon can I return to work after being sick?

Usually, you can return to work as soon as you feel well, but certain jobs are more likely to allow the spread of bacteria from workers to clients. For this reason, food handlers, health care workers, and child care providers must stay off work until they are cleared by the Medical Officer of Health.

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For more information contact the nearest Government Service Centre or Regional Health and Community Services Board Office.

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