

Campylobacter Infection

Campylobacter infection is a bacterial infection which most commonly causes gastroenteritis but may also cause illness affecting the entire body.

Symptoms may include diarrhoea (loose bowel movements which may sometimes be bloody), fever and stomach cramps. Vomiting is not common. The most severe infections occur in the very young, the elderly and malnourished people.

Campylobacter infection is the commonest precursor illness for Guillain-Barré Syndrome, a condition which causes muscular paralysis.

The infection is diagnosed by growing the bacteria from a specimen of faeces sent to a laboratory.

Eating contaminated food is the most frequent cause of this infection. *Campylobacter* is common on raw poultry. Infected infants, household pets (especially puppies and kittens), domestic stock and contaminated water are also occasional sources of infection.

Incubation period

(time between becoming infected and developing symptoms)

Usually 2 – 5 days, with a range of 1 – 10 days.

Infectious period

(time during which an infected person can infect others)

A person is infectious for as long as the *Campylobacter* bacteria are in their faeces, which may be for an average of two to three weeks after symptoms are gone. The risk of infecting others decreases when diarrhoea is no longer present.

Treatment

Antibiotic treatment is not usually needed for *Campylobacter* infection. Recovery from symptoms usually occurs within a few days. There are several treatments that are useful for gastroenteritis of any cause.

The following are general recommendations for the treatment of gastroenteritis:

- > Give plenty of fluids. Oral rehydration solution is highly recommended for children with mild to moderate dehydration. It is available at pharmacies and should be administered following the instructions on the packaging.
- > Mildly unwell children should be given their usual fluids more often. Carbonated (fizzy) drinks or undiluted juice should be avoided.
- > Medicines to prevent vomiting or diarrhoea should not be given (especially in children), except where specifically advised by a doctor.
- > Breastfed babies should continue to be breastfed throughout their illness.
- > Children on formula or solid diets should restart their normal diet (including full strength lactose containing milk) following rehydration with oral rehydration solution.
- > Children who are hungry or ask for food should be given small portions of their usual foods, but avoid foods high in sugar or fat.

Seek medical advice if there are any of the following symptoms:

Adults

- > signs of dehydration, such as thirst and decreased urination, lethargy, dry mouth, feeling faint on standing
- > fever
- > severe abdominal pain
- > bloody diarrhoea.

Children

- > signs of dehydration, such as thirst and decreased urination, lethargy, dry mouth, sunken eyes, feeling faint on standing
- > fever
- > abdominal pain
- > bloody diarrhoea
- > any symptoms in a child less than 12 months of age.

Campylobacter Infection (cont.)

Control of spread

- > Wash hands after handling raw meat, especially poultry, and keep food preparation areas clean.
- > Wash hands after gardening or touching animals.
- > Meat, particularly poultry, should be thoroughly cooked.
- > Do not store uncooked poultry or other meat near foods which will be eaten raw, such as salad items.
- > If pets are sick with diarrhoeal illness, have them treated.
- > Exclude from child care, preschool, school and work until there has been no diarrhoea for 24 hours. If working in a child care, health care or commercial food setting, the exclusion period should be 48 hours.



***Campylobacter* infection is a notifiable disease**

- > Hand Hygiene
- > Preventing Food Poisoning in the Home
- > Collecting a Faecal Sample