

Campylobacter Fact Sheet

Campylobacter are bacteria that can infect the bowel. It is one of the commonest causes of infectious diarrhoea in the UK. Most cases occur as single infections and not as part of large outbreaks.

Not everyone infected with Campylobacter will have symptoms, but symptoms include:

- Diarrhoea - sometimes watery and often bloody
- Abdominal pain / stomach cramps
- Headache and muscle aches
- High fever
- Nausea and vomiting
- Dehydration

The incubation period (the time between being in contact with the bacteria and symptoms starting) is usually between 1 and 3 days but can be as long as 11 days.

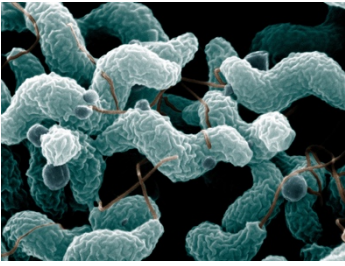
Symptoms usually settle within a week, but a very small number of infected people may experience complications e.g. a type of arthritis may occur or rare neurological symptoms may develop in response to the infection. Not everyone who is infected with Campylobacter will develop symptoms.

How does it spread?

Campylobacter is transmitted to humans from animals & animal products. The usual route is food borne, through eating undercooked meat (especially poultry), non-pasteurised (raw) milk, milk from bottles where the lid has been damaged, untreated contaminated water or ice. There may also be person to person spread with poor hygiene.

Washing your hands thoroughly after touching infected animals both farm and domestic is very important. Campylobacter can be found on many uncooked meats and kitchen equipment used to prepare raw meat or poultry e.g. knives and chopping boards - so these must also be washed thoroughly.

The risk of the infected person passing the infection on to others is fairly low. However, the infection can be spread within families and close-knit groups if there is a breakdown in hygiene practices. An infected person may contaminate food if they do not wash their hands properly before preparing, cooking or serving food.



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What precautions should I take?

Thorough handwashing with soap and water after handling raw meat, going to the toilet, changing nappies, contact with animals.

Ensure that foods from animal sources, especially poultry, are thoroughly cooked.

Do not use the same chopping board or kitchen surface or knife for raw meat and then for other foodstuffs without first washing it thoroughly to prevent the spread of infection.

Do not drink unpasteurised (raw) milk or milk from bottles where the tops have been damaged.

Remember cooked meat should be stored at the top of the fridge and uncooked meat at the bottom.

Thoroughly wash all salad vegetables and fruit before consumption.

What should I do if I develop symptoms?

Generally, Campylobacter infection is usually self-limiting and people do not require treatment other than making sure that they drink enough fluid to prevent dehydration. Sometimes a Dr may decide to prescribe an antibiotic if symptoms are very severe. If prescribed it is important that you complete the full course as instructed on the bottle or packet.

As always it is important that anyone with a diarrhoeal illness does not return to work, school, nursery or their Judo club, etc until they have been completely symptom free for 48 hours. They should avoid contact with anyone with a compromised immune system, or the very young / very old.

If you have a compromised immune system due to other medical problems, it is particularly important to be very vigilant about any symptoms and consult your Dr immediately if you develop any. Severe diarrhoea may interfere with the absorption of regular medication required for the control of chronic disease (eg. Diabetes, epilepsy, blood pressure, etc.). so you must consult your Dr if you develop any symptoms.