

Campylobacter

What is *Campylobacter*?

Campylobacter is a bacterium that causes an illness in people and animals. It affects the stomach and intestines and is a major source of foodborne diarrheal illness worldwide.

What are the symptoms of *Campylobacter*?

Symptoms begin 1-10 days (usually 2-5 days) after ingesting the *Campylobacter* bacteria and typically last one week. Some infected people may not have any symptoms, but still are able to spread the bacteria. Symptoms include:

- Diarrhea – frequently bloody
- Fever
- Stomach pain
- Nausea - sometimes with vomiting
- Tiredness
- Dehydration from diarrhea and vomiting

What is the treatment for *Campylobacter*?

- Most symptoms will go away on their own in 3-10 days.
- Ill persons should drink extra fluids as long as the diarrhea lasts to avoid dehydration.
- If symptoms persist or are severe, contact your health care provider.

How do I get *Campylobacter*?

People must ingest (swallow or eat) the *Campylobacter* bacteria to become infected. *Campylobacter* is usually spread through the following:

- *Campylobacter* can be found in raw meats (especially poultry) and unpasteurized milk.
- Raw meats and their juices can spread the bacteria if they touch ready-to-eat foods (salads, breads, cheeses, etc.), food preparation surfaces and utensils (cutting boards, plates, knives, etc.) or hands.
- People who become infected with *Campylobacter* will have the bacteria in their feces (stools). If people do not properly wash their hands after using the restroom or changing diapers, and then handle food that others will eat or objects that others will put in their mouths (e.g., toys), they can spread the bacteria to other people.



- Pets, mainly puppies and kittens, can also be infected and can spread the bacteria to you through their feces.
- *Campylobacter* is **NOT** spread from one person to another by coughing or sneezing, sharing drinks, hugging or kissing.

(over)

How do I prevent *Campylobacter*?

- Cook meats (especially poultry) until well done. Poultry is well done when it reaches 165°F and juices run clear.
- Do not drink unpasteurized milk.
 - Wash hands thoroughly with soap and sanitize utensils and food preparation surfaces (especially cutting boards) after preparing raw meats.
- Wash hands after handling pets (or other animals) or cleaning up after animals. Avoid letting pets lick you on the face.
- Always wash your hands after using the restroom. You may have and spread the bacteria even if you do not have any symptoms.
- Wash your hands and the child's hands after diapering or helping with toilet training.



Health Tip

Follow these steps to prevent cross-contamination in your kitchen:

- Wash, rinse and sanitize cutting boards, knives, utensils and work surfaces after preparing raw meats.
- Wash hands with soap and warm running water for at least 20 seconds after preparing raw meats.
- Keep raw meats separated from other foods.
- Store raw meats on the bottom shelf in the refrigerator so raw meat juices will not drip on and contaminate other food.
- Use a separate cutting board for preparing raw meats. Color-coding cutting boards may be helpful.
- Wash all produce thoroughly.

If you think you have *Campylobacter*:

- Do not prepare food for others.
- If your job involves handling food, caring for small children or if you work in health care, do not go to work and contact your health care provider.
- Children who might have *Campylobacter* should not go to child care settings – especially if they have diarrhea.

Why does the health department investigate *Campylobacter*?

- It is the responsibility of the local health department to investigate *Campylobacter* in the community. The health department keeps track of how many people are getting the disease and works to limit the number of people exposed.
- Most people infected with *Campylobacter* are single, sporadic cases. However, sometimes there are outbreaks when two or more people become ill from the same source. The health department monitors *Campylobacter* in an attempt to identify and stop outbreaks of the disease.
- Tri-County Health Department is part of a Centers for Disease Control and Prevention monitoring system that studies what puts people at risk for getting *Campylobacter*.

