

CAMPYLOBACTER

What is Campylobacter?

Campylobacter is the most common cause of food poisoning and gastro-enteritis (inflammation of the stomach and intestine) in this country. It is generally found in the gut of animals such as turkeys, chickens, wild birds, cattle and pets.

How do I know I have a Campylobacter infection?

Diagnosis can only be confirmed by testing a sample of your faeces. This is usually at the request of your doctor.

How is it spread?

Campylobacter is spread by eating or drinking contaminated food, water or unpasteurised (raw) milk. Pets such as cats and dogs may be a source of the bacteria in your home. Many animals including cattle and poultry are naturally infected. Person to person spread can occur if personal hygiene is poor.

Campylobacter can also be found in raw meat, raw poultry, unwashed salad and vegetables. Raw food can contain large numbers of bacteria. Washing of salads, fruits and vegetables helps reduce their numbers to a safe level. Thorough cooking of meat and poultry will kill the bacteria.

It is important not to allow raw foods or raw food surfaces and equipment to come into contact with ready to eat foods as the bacteria may be transferred. As few as 500 bacteria can cause illness.

What are the symptoms?

Severe abdominal pain, profuse diarrhoea (sometimes bloody), fever, and tiredness. May be confused with appendicitis because of the severe pain and fever. Vomiting is uncommon.

How soon after exposure do symptoms occur?

The symptoms will normally begin to show 2-5 days after eating the infected food. The illness can last up to ten days but is usually over within five days.

Do infected people need to stay away from work or school?

All cases of gastro-enteritis are regarded as potentially infectious. People should normally stay away from work or school until free from diarrhoea and vomiting. Inform your employer, child carer, nursery or school as soon as possible to help them identify if they may have an outbreak.

Anybody in a 'high risk' group needs to stay away long enough to allow the infection time to clear. This includes:

- food handlers involved with unwrapped or ready to eat food,
- staff of health care facilities in contact with food or patients,
- children aged below 5 years attending nurseries, playgroups, etc
- older children and adults who may find it difficult to implement good standards of personal hygiene

It is important to contact us if you, or anyone else in your household, are in one of these groups. People in these categories should not return to work, school or nursery until their symptoms have ceased and until their bowel habits have been normal for at least 48 hours. This is provided that they wash their hands thoroughly after using the toilet.

How can I prevent it spreading?

Handwashing is the most important factor in preventing the spread of infection. Thoroughly wash your hands with soap in warm running water:

- AFTER using or cleaning the toilet
- AFTER touching anything contaminated by diarrhoea or vomiting
- AFTER attending to anybody who is unwell
- AFTER handling dirty laundry, clothing or bedding
- AFTER handling used nappies
- BEFORE handling, preparing, serving, or consuming food or drink

People who are ill should ideally use bactericidal liquid soap and separate towels or disposable paper tissues. A nailbrush can assist you to clean under your fingernails. Always dry your hands well as this helps to remove bacteria.

Cleaning the toilet

For as long as people are unwell:

- wipe the toilet seat with disinfectant after each use
- wash and disinfect other items like bedpans or potties after each use.
- use a cloth soaked in disinfectant to wipe the toilet seat, flush handle, washbasin taps, and door handle two or three times a day.
- clean the toilet bowl using a (toilet) brush and disinfectant. Rinse the brush by flushing the toilet, and replace in its holder.
- keep any rubber gloves used for cleaning the toilet for this use only.
- flush the toilet with the seat and lid down.
- Laundry
- keep dirty laundry from anyone with food poisoning separate
- if possible remove any heavy soiling into the toilet before washing
- wash soiled clothing and bedding separately on as hot a washing programme as possible without exceeding fabric care instructions.

Points to remember

- make sure everybody follows these precautions
- assist young children to wash their hands properly

REMEMBER TO WASH YOUR HANDS FREQUENTLY