

## What is *Campylobacter*?

*Campylobacter* are bacteria that cause a range of symptoms including diarrhoea, vomiting, stomach pains, fever and generally feeling unwell. It is the most common cause of food poisoning in the United Kingdom.

## Who gets *Campylobacter* infections?

Anyone can get *Campylobacter* infection, but certain groups are more likely to get the infection:

- young children under five years old;
- adults over 60 years old;
- people who work with farm animals or in the meat industry;
- travellers to developing countries.

## How do you get infected with *Campylobacter*?

Most people become infected by eating contaminated food. *Campylobacter* is found in most raw poultry and is common in raw meat. It can also be present in unpasteurised milk and untreated water.

It is impossible to tell from its appearance whether food is contaminated with *Campylobacter*. It will look, smell and taste normal so correct handling and cooking are very important.

It is also possible to get a *Campylobacter* infection through contact with infected pets, farm animals, and someone else who has the illness.

## How can you avoid getting infected with *Campylobacter*?

Wash your hands thoroughly with soap and warm water:

- before preparing and eating food;
- after handling raw food;

- after going to the toilet or changing a baby's nappy;
- after contact with pets and other animals;
- after working in the garden.

Do not drink untreated water from lakes, rivers or streams.

You should pay special attention to hygiene during farm visits, washing hands after any contact with animals or their surroundings and eating only in designated areas.

Maintain high standards of hygiene when storing, handling or preparing food.

## How can you maintain high standards of hygiene when storing, handling or preparing food?

Take chilled and frozen foods home quickly – then put into the refrigerator or freezer at once.

Keep cooked food away from raw food. Store raw foods below cooked or ready-to-eat foods in the fridge to prevent contamination.

Cook food thoroughly, especially meat, so that it is piping hot. Follow cooking instructions on the pack.

If you reheat food, make sure it is piping hot all the way through. Only reheat food once.

Keep hot foods hot and cold foods cold. Don't just leave these foods sitting at room temperature.

Keep your refrigerator at 0–5°C. Get a thermometer to check temperatures inside the refrigerator.

Check 'use by' dates on food, and use foods within the recommended date on the pack.

Keep pets away from food, dishes and worktops.

Wash hands thoroughly before preparing and eating food and after handling raw food.

Keep all kitchen surfaces and equipment, including knives, chopping boards and dish cloths clean.

Wash worktops and utensils between handling raw and cooked foods.

### **How can you prevent others in your household becoming infected with *Campylobacter*?**

Everyone in the house should wash their hands thoroughly with soap and warm water after going to the toilet, after handling soiled clothing or bedding and before preparing/eating food.

Wash the infected person's laundry separately and on the hottest cycle of the washing machine for that particular fabric.

Clean toilet seats, toilet bowls, flush handles, taps and wash hand basins after use with detergent and hot water, followed by a household disinfectant.

Everyone in the house should have their own towel and they should not use anyone else's.

The infected person should not prepare or serve food for others.

### **What are the symptoms of *Campylobacter* infection and how long do they last?**

Symptoms include diarrhoea, vomiting, stomach pains and cramps, fever, and generally feeling unwell.

Symptoms usually develop within 2–5 days of exposure to the infection. Most cases resolve after 2–3 days of diarrhoea and almost all settle within one week.

### **How are *Campylobacter* infections treated?**

There is no specific treatment for *Campylobacter* infections. Most people will recover fully without treatment.

During this time it is important to drink plenty of fluids as diarrhoea or vomiting can lead to dehydration and you can lose important sugars and minerals from your body.

If you feel sick and have difficulty keeping fluids down try taking small sips of fluid frequently. Avoid tea, coffee, carbonated drinks or alcohol. Always dilute sugary drinks even if you would not normally dilute them.

In some cases, if the infection is very severe, you may be given antibiotics. If you are given antibiotics it is essential that you complete the course as prescribed.

### **Do you need to see your GP?**

If you need advice on the treatment of your *Campylobacter* infection you should discuss this with your GP.

Always contact your GP if any of the following apply:

- your symptoms are severe or do not improve after a few days;
- you have a high temperature (fever) of 38°C (100.4°F) or over;
- you have symptoms of severe dehydration, such as sunken eyes and passing small quantities of dark, strong smelling urine;
- you have a baby with symptoms.

## Do you need to stay off work or school?

**Yes.** While you are ill and have symptoms you are infectious to other people. You can return to work or school once you have been free from diarrhoea for 48 hours.

You should tell your employer you have had *Campylobacter* infection if you work with vulnerable groups such as the elderly, the young, those in poor health, or if you handle food.

Children should not attend school/childcare or play with other children until they are fully recovered and symptom free for 48 hours.



Public Health Agency, 12-22 Linenhall Street,  
Belfast BT2 8BS. Tel: 028 90 321 313  
[www.publichealth.hscni.net](http://www.publichealth.hscni.net)