# Campylobacter

## What is Campylobacter Infection?

*Campylobacter* are bacteria that can cause diarrhea in people. Campylobacter bacteria can make you sick if they get into your mouth. *Campylobacter* is the most common cause of infectious diarrhea in Canada.

## Where does *Campylobacter* come from? How is it spread?

*Campylobacter* infection often comes from touching or eating raw or undercooked poultry (like chicken). Just one drop of raw poultry juice in your mouth can make you sick. Outbreaks have been caused by drinking unpasteurized milk or water containing the bacteria.

*Campylobacter* lives in the intestines of animals and birds. It can be spread to people through contact with animals, including farm animals and family pets like puppies and kittens. Contact with bird feeders can also be a source of *Campylobacter* bacteria. Infection can happen if the bacteria from your hands are transferred to your mouth.

Well water, lakes, streams and beaches can become contaminated from the feces of animals or wild birds. Campylobacter is common in developing countries. Travelers may be at risk of Campylobacter infection.

*Campylobacter* is not spread by coughing, kissing, or through normal, everyday contact with neighbors or friends but people with *Camplylobacter* infection can spread the bacteria to food, surfaces, other animals or people through poor personal hygiene practices.

> If you are employed as a food handler or a health care worker, go home or stay home if you have diarrhea. Report your symptoms to your manager.

## What are the symptoms of Campylobacter infection?

Symptoms start two to five days after swallowing the bacteria and can last up to ten days. Some people don't have any symptoms. Symptoms range from mild to severe and may include:

- Diarrhea (sometimes bloody)
- Abdominal cramps
- Fever
- Nausea
- Vomiting
- Headache

See a Health Care Provider (Doctor or Nurse Practitioner) if you think you are sick from *Campylobacter.* Ask that your diarrhea be tested.

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## Am I at risk?

Anyone can become sick from a *Campylobacter* infection. Those at greatest risk include:
- Children under 5 years of age, the elderly, and people with weakened immune systems,
- Workers in poultry processing plants and those who work with animals, and
- Travelers.

## Do I need treatment?

Your Health Care Provider may prescribe antibiotics, which can be helpful if started within the first few days you are sick. It is not recommended to take medicines to stop the diarrhea. Drink fluids, like water and juice, to stay hydrated.

## How do I prevent *Campylobacter* infection?

Safe food handling, proper hand washing and good personal hygiene are the most important ways to prevent getting and passing on *Campylobacte*r.

Wash your hands well:
- Before preparing food and immediately after touching raw meat, poultry and raw produce.
- After using the toilet, helping others toilet, or changing diapers
- After touching animals and pets**,** pet food, treats and toys, and cleaning up after your pet

Foods that are contaminated with *Campylobacter* bacteria do not look or smell bad. People who have *Campylobacter* infection should not prepare food for others because they may contaminate the food and make other people sick.

Follow these four simple steps to "Be Food Safe".

**Clean**
- Wash your hands before preparing food, and wash often during preparation. Washing is especially important after handling raw meat, poultry, fish, seafood or raw eggs.
- Wash fruits and vegetables with clean water before cooking or eating.
- Clean and then sanitize cutting boards, utensils, and countertops after preparing raw meat, poultry, egg products and raw vegetables.
    - **Sanitize** with a mild bleach and water solution: mix 1 ml (¼ teaspoon) of unscented household bleach into 500 ml (2 cups) of water.

**Separate**
- Keep raw meat, poultry, seafood, eggs and their juices away from other food items while shopping, during storage in the refrigerator
- When preparing food keep raw meat, poultry, seafood, eggs away from food that won't be cooked. Use separate utensils for raw and cooked foods.

**Cook**
- Cook all meat, fish and poultry to safe temperatures. Use a food thermometer.
    - Cook whole poultry to 82°C/180°F.
    - Cook food mixtures that includes poultry, egg, meat, fish to 74°C/165°F
    - Cook poultry (other than whole poultry) and ground poultry to 74°C/165°F
    - Cook pork, pork products, ground meat that does not contain poultry to 71°C/160°F

- Keep hot foods hot above 60°C/140°F if not served right away.

**Chill**
- Keep the fridge at 4°C (40°F) or below.
- Chill leftovers and takeout foods within 2 hours.
- Thaw food in the refrigerator, under cold running water or in the microwave just before cooking. Never thaw at room temperature.

## Other Considerations:
- ✓ Drink water from a safe supply. Lakes, streams, or other sources are untreated and may not be safe. Keep water out of your mouth while swimming in lakes or pools.

- ✓ Use only pasteurized milk and foods made from pasteurized milk. Drink pasteurized juices, or ciders.

- ✓ Use only eggs that are graded, clean, and free of cracks.
- ✓ Keep pets away from food storage and preparation areas.

If you have a *Campylobacter* infection, your local Public Health Unit will be in contact with you and can answer any questions you may have.

**If you have any questions or concerns, please contact the Infectious Disease Control Team at 519-663-5317 or go to www.healthunit.com**

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