

CAMPYLOBACTERIOSIS FACT SHEET

What is campylobacteriosis?

Campylobacteriosis is an illness caused by a bacteria called *Campylobacter*. *Campylobacter* is one of the most common types of bacteria causing diarrhea in the United States. Approximately 2.4 million people (nearly one percent of the U.S population) are infected by *Campylobacter* each year, with an estimated 200,000 people infected each year in California.

How do people get campylobacteriosis?

Eating food contaminated with *Campylobacter* can result in illness. Campylobacteriosis is most commonly associated with eating raw or undercooked poultry. Chickens are frequently infected with *Campylobacter* although they may not show symptoms. Past studies have shown that over half of the raw chicken meat sold in the United States contains *Campylobacter*. Cross-contamination with *Campylobacter* can sometimes occur when raw poultry is sliced on a cutting board, and the unwashed board or knife is then used to prepare vegetables or other lightly cooked foods.

In addition to poultry, other animals can also be infected by *Campylobacter*. Outbreaks of campylobacteriosis have occurred when people drink surface or stream water that has been contaminated by infected birds or cows. Additionally, people have become ill from drinking or eating products made with unpasteurized milk from infected cows. People have also become ill after direct exposure to the feces of infected dog or cat.

Person-to-person spread of *Campylobacter* is uncommon, but can occur. This means that *Campylobacter* can also be spread through direct or indirect contact with an infected person's feces. For example, this can occur if an infected person prepares food for other people without washing their hands thoroughly after using the toilet. Person-to-person spread can also occur in child care and other institutional settings if people do not wash their hands well. Transmission can also occur through certain types of sexual contact (e.g., oral-anal contact).

What are the symptoms of campylobacteriosis?

The illness is usually mild, and some people with *Campylobacter* have no symptoms at all. Symptoms of campylobacteriosis may include diarrhea, abdominal cramps, and fever. The diarrhea may be bloody, and may be accompanied by nausea and vomiting. In some persons with weakened immune systems, it can cause a serious, life-threatening infection. Symptoms usually begin two to five days after exposure to *Campylobacter* and lasts about a week. Most people with campylobacteriosis recover completely. However, a small percentage of people may have joint pain and swelling after infection. In addition, a rare disease called Guillain-Barre syndrome that causes weakness and paralysis can occur several weeks after the initial illness.

How is campylobacteriosis diagnosed?

The diagnosis is usually made when a laboratory finds *Campylobacter* in the feces of an infected person. Uncommonly, *Campylobacter* may be found in other clinical samples, such as blood.

How is campylobacteriosis treated?

Most people with campylobacteriosis recover fully without any antibiotics. It is important to drink enough fluids to prevent dehydration. People with diarrhea (especially children in day care or people who handle food) should not go to school, day care or work until the diarrhea ends, to prevent spreading campylobacteriosis to other people.

What can a person do to prevent campylobacteriosis?

- Thoroughly cook all meats, especially poultry. Poultry should be cooked to reach a minimum internal temperature of 165°F. If you are served undercooked poultry in a restaurant, send it back for further cooking.
- Wash hands before preparing food and immediately after handling any raw poultry or meat.
- Avoid cross-contamination by carefully cleaning all cutting boards, countertops, and utensils with soap and hot water after preparing raw poultry or meat and prevent juices from raw meats from dripping on other foods. Make sure that other foods, such as fruits or vegetables, do not come into contact with cutting boards or knives that have been used with raw poultry or meat.
- Always refrigerate meat products. Never leave raw meat at room temperature.
- Avoid unpasteurized milk and soft cheeses and untreated (not chlorinated or boiled) surface or stream water.
- Wash hands well with soap and water after using the bathroom, changing diapers, or handling pets, including animals at petting zoos. Make sure children wash their hands well after going to the bathroom or handling pets.

What is public health doing about campylobacteriosis?

The California Department of Public Health (CDPH) and local health departments monitor campylobacteriosis in California. Because campylobacteriosis is a disease that can be spread to other people, health care providers are required by law to report cases of campylobacteriosis to the local health department. Public health agencies, including the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention and the U.S. Department of Agriculture, are making an effort to educate the public about safe food handling practices, which is the best way of preventing campylobacteriosis.

In addition, if many cases occur at the same time, it may mean that a restaurant, food, or water supply has a problem that requires intervention by the health department. CDPH can assist local health departments to investigate outbreaks of illness, find the source(s) of contamination, and devise control measures.

Where can I get more information on campylobacteriosis?

- You can get more information on campylobacteriosis from your health care provider, your local health department, and the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention website:

<http://www.cdc.gov/nczved/divisions/dfbmd/diseases/campylobacter/>

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