

## What is Campylobacter?

Campylobacter is the most common cause of bacterial infection of the gut and a common cause of diarrhoea. The gastroenteritis it causes is called Campylobacteriosis. Campylobacter infection may occur throughout the year, but is more common in late spring/early summer.

## Where does it come from?

Food is the most likely source of Campylobacter in humans. It is estimated that at least half of all raw chicken is contaminated with Campylobacter during mass production. Campylobacter live harmlessly in the gut of poultry, cattle, sheep, household pets and birds. During slaughter and processing of farm animals, the contamination from the gut can spread to other parts of the animal. This means that all raw meat and poultry should be treated as potentially infectious. In addition, unpasteurised milk is a potential source of Campylobacter. Campylobacter can withstand and grow in relatively low temperatures therefore untreated or inadequately treated water supplies, streams and ponds can also serve as a reservoir for the bacteria. Some birds can carry campylobacter. Do not drink milk if the bottle top has been pecked through.

## How does it spread?

The infection is most commonly acquired by eating contaminated food, drinks or having contact with the droppings of infected animals. The risk of person-to-person spread is highest among children, especially if personal hygiene is poor. Adequate cooking should eradicate Campylobacter in food. However, the bacteria may spread in a kitchen from contaminated to non-contaminated food if hygiene practices are substandard.

## What are the symptoms?

Symptoms usually develop 3-5 days after eating contaminated food or drink and usually stop within 4-7 days. These may include:

*Stomach cramps*

*Diarrhoea (sometimes bloody)*

*Nausea*

*Vomiting (less common)*

*Headache and fever*

## Can I prevent infection?

Adhering to the following practices can reduce the risk of contracting or spreading Campylobacter:

### 1. Always wash your hands.

Regular, thorough hand washing is essential and should be done:

Before:

- *Food handling and cooking*
- *Eating*
- *Feeding young children, the elderly or ill individuals*

and After:

- *Using the toilet*
- *Handling animals*
- *Changing nappies*
- *Handling raw meat or poultry*

### 2. Always ensure that food is thoroughly cooked.

### 3. Practise safe food preparation.

- *Check 'use by' dates - use only food within the recommended period.*
- *Do not use the same chopping board for raw food and other food stuffs.*
- *Clean knives and utensils between use, when preparing raw food and other foodstuffs.*
- *Clean food preparation areas with detergent and hot water.*
- *Prepare and store raw and cooked foods separately.*
- *Store raw meat and poultry in the fridge on the shelf below cooked foods to avoid drip contamination.*

- *Defrost poultry, meat and other products thoroughly before cooking. These items should be cooked until the juices run clear and there are no pink bits inside.*

*Always follow manufacturer's instructions.*

- *Once cooked, consume food immediately or cool rapidly and refrigerate or freeze.*
- *Keep perishable products in the refrigerator operating below 5°C.*  
*Campylobacter can multiply on food at room temperature.*
- *If you re-heat food, make sure it is piping hot.*
- *Wash salad items and other food to be eaten raw.*
- *Exclude pests and pets from the kitchen.*

### 4. Avoid consuming unpasteurised dairy products, particularly unpasteurised milk.

### 5. Do not drink untreated water from rivers, streams and unchecked private water supplies.

## Will I need treatment?

People with Campylobacter do not usually require antibiotics. If you do become infected, remember to drink plenty of fluids. Campylobacter can cause the body to lose a large amount of water through diarrhoea and vomiting. Adequate fluid intake will replace the lost water and prevent dehydration.

## When can I return to work?

No exclusion is necessary for any group of people. Nobody should return to work unless the diarrhoea has stopped for 48 hours and remember to maintain adequate hygiene standards.

# Campylobacter

PATIENT INFORMATION



*If you suspect you have contracted Campylobacteriosis, you will need to provide a stool specimen to confirm this, in which case you should contact your General Practitioner (GP).*

*If you would simply like more information, contact either your GP or the Public Health Protection Unit at Greater Glasgow & Clyde NHS Board.*

*Tel : 0141-201-4917*