

# CAMPYLOBACTER

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Your Questions Answered

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EAST CAMBRIDGESHIRE  
DISTRICT COUNCIL

## **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 (stools). 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 salad, fruit and vegetables helps reduce the number of bacteria to a safe level. Thorough cooking of meat and poultry will kill the bacteria.

It is also important to keep raw and cooked food apart and use separate knives, bowls and chopping boards or thoroughly wash in-between uses 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 exposure. 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 gastroenteritis are regarded as potentially infectious. All infected people should stay away from work or school until free from diarrhoea and vomiting (without medication) for at least 48 hours. Inform your employer, child carer or school as soon as possible to help them identify if they may have an outbreak.

If you belong to one of the following 'high risk' groups, additional precautions are needed & you have a duty to report your illness to your employer, child carer or school.

- 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 carry out good personal hygiene

Infected people in these groups must not return to work, school or nursery until their symptoms have ceased and their bowel habits have been normal for at least 48 hours (without medication). This is provided that they wash their hands thoroughly after using the toilet.

It is very important to get in touch with us if you, or anyone else in your household, are in one of these 'high risk' groups. This is to enable us to give any necessary advice to halt the potential spread of the illness.

## **How can I prevent it spreading?**

Hand washing is the most important factor in preventing the spread of infection. Thoroughly wash your hands with soap under 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
- AFTER touching animals during visits at farms, wildlife parks, zoos, pet corners, etc

People who are ill should ideally use anti-bacterial liquid soap and separate towels or disposable paper tissues. A nailbrush can assist you to clean under your fingernails. Always dry your hands properly as this helps to remove bacteria. Young children should be assisted to ensure they wash their hands properly.

## **Cleaning the toilet**

For as long as people are unwell:

- Disinfect the toilet seat after each use, using a separate cloth
- Wash and disinfect other items like bedpans or potties after each use
- Disinfect the door handle, wash hand basin taps and flush handle after use

- 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

- Dirty laundry from persons with food poisoning should be kept separate from other laundry
- 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

## Safety Points to remember

- Always treat raw meats and raw poultry as if they may contain campylobacter
- Ensure meat and poultry are cooked thoroughly including barbecues and microwaving. This is normally until the juices run clear
- Always wash hands between touching raw and cooked foods
- Keep raw and cooked food apart (store raw meat at the bottom of the fridge) and use separate knives, bowls and chopping boards or thoroughly wash in-between uses
- Clean and disinfect all surfaces between preparing raw and cooked food
- Wash salad, vegetables and fruit before eating
- Only reheat food once and make sure it is piping hot throughout
- AVOID eating or drinking untreated milk or dairy products, or drinking untreated water
- Make sure children wash their hands after handling pets or other animals and before touching food

**REMEMBER TO WASH YOUR HANDS FREQUENTLY  
ASSIST YOUNG CHILDREN TO WASH THEIR HANDS PROPERLY  
MAKE SURE EVERYBODY FOLLOWS THESE PRECAUTIONS**

**Further advice is available by contacting your Doctor or from:**

East Cambridgeshire District Council  
Environmental Services  
The Grange  
Nutholt Lane  
Ely, Cambs CB7 4EE  
Tel: 01353 665555  
Fax: 01353 616223