

Campylobacter

What is campylobacter?

Campylobacter is a bacterial infection that affects the intestinal tract and, rarely, the bloodstream. It is considered the most common cause of bacterial diarrhea. Infection can happen anytime throughout the year. Cases may occur alone or as part of a group or outbreak.

Who gets campylobacter?

Any person can get campylobacter, but it is recognized more often in children 4 years of age and younger and in adults 25 to 35 years old.

How do you get campylobacter?

Campylobacter bacteria are spread throughout our food chain and environment. The bacteria often contaminate raw meats (particularly birds), milk, water supplies, and other food items. Other sources of infection may include pets (dogs and birds), farm and wild animals. People become infected by eating or drinking contaminated food or water, or by coming into contact with the poop from an infected animal. It is very rare to get campylobacter from another person.

What are the symptoms of campylobacter?

Anyone can get campylobacter infection. Usually people get sick within 2 to 5 days of exposure, but it can be as short as 1 day to as long as 10 days before illness occurs. The symptoms are mild to severe diarrhea, often with fever and traces of blood in the poop. Stomachache, nausea and vomiting also may occur.

How long does a person carry campylobacter in their poop?

Generally, infected people will continue to pass the bacteria in their poop for a few days to a week or more. Certain antibiotics may shorten the time of bacterial shedding.

What is the treatment for campylobacter?

Most people with campylobacter will recover on their own although relapses sometimes occur. Some may require intravenous fluids to prevent dehydration, Antibiotics may be used to treat severe cases or to shorten the carrier phase in food handlers, health care workers, and children in day care. Some physicians also might treat mild cases with antibiotics to prevent a relapse of symptoms.

Do infected persons need to be isolated or excluded from work or school?

Since campylobacter bacteria are in the poop, only people with diarrhea who are unable to control their bowel habits (for example, infants and young children) should be isolated.

Most infected persons may return to work or school when the diarrhea has stopped, provided they carefully wash their hands after using the toilet. However, some persons must get the approval of the Kansas City Health Department before returning to work. The approval process requires testing to show that the bacteria is gone from the poop. The Health Department makes the decision on who needs approval based on individual circumstances, for example, if the person is a food handler.

How can campylobacter be prevented?

The most important prevention activity is careful handwashing (soap and hot water for at least 30 seconds) after using the toilet, before and after preparing food, and especially between preparing different food items.

Always treat raw bird, beef and pork as if they are contaminated. Wrap fresh meats in plastic bags at the market to prevent blood from dripping onto other foods. Refrigerate meats right away to make the time kept at room temperature as little as possible. Cutting boards and counters used for preparation of the meat should be washed immediately after use to prevent contaminating other foods. Avoid eating raw or undercooked meats and ensure that the correct internal cooking temperature (165 degrees) is reached, particularly when using a microwave.

Drink only pasteurized milk. Never drink water from creeks, lakes or springs. Make sure that those who handle pets, wash their hands after such play.