



Campylobacter

What is *Campylobacter*?

Campylobacter is a germ (bacteria) that can infect the intestines (bowels) of people and animals. *Campylobacteriosis*, the illness caused by *Campylobacter*, is one of the most common bacterial types of diarrheal illness in the United States. In rare cases, *Campylobacter* can spread to the blood and cause a serious infection.

How does *Campylobacter* spread?

People can get *Campylobacter* by eating food that is raw or not cooked properly or by drinking contaminated beverages, including untreated water. *Campylobacter* is most commonly spread through raw or undercooked poultry (chicken or turkey) or from food contaminated by these items. *Campylobacter* may also spread through unpasteurized dairy products, such as milk, through contaminated water and ice, or through other contaminated food. Cooking or pasteurizing food will kill these bacteria so the food can be safely eaten.

Campylobacter has also been found in the stool (feces) of farm animals and pets (including cattle, chickens, cats and dogs), even if they appear healthy. The bacteria are also found in different kinds of wildlife. Therefore, you should wash your hands with soap and water after touching animals or their stool.

What are the symptoms of campylobacteriosis?

The most common symptoms are diarrhea (sometimes bloody), stomach pain, fever, nausea, and vomiting. These symptoms most often start within 2 to 5 days after the germs have been swallowed. Healthy people who get campylobacter infection recover completely within two to five days, although sometimes recovery can take up to 10 days.

How do I know if I have campylobacteriosis?

Your healthcare provider can send a stool (feces) sample to a laboratory. The laboratory will test the sample for *Campylobacter* bacteria.

How is campylobacteriosis treated?

Most people recover without any treatment. However, extra fluids may be needed to prevent dehydration. Antibiotics may be used to treat campylobacteriosis in people who cannot fight off the illness on their own.

How can I prevent *Campylobacter*?

When preparing food that must be cooked before eating like eggs, chicken, and other meats handle it as if it is contaminated. Remember to always practice good handwashing.

Chill!

- Refrigerate leftovers and unused portions promptly.
- Food should not be left out for more than 2 hours. If out on a hot summer day, do not leave food out for more than 1 hour.
- Keep your cooler full to maintain cold temperatures, keep it out of the sun and limit the number of times you open it.

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Clean!

- Wash your hands with warm soapy water for at least 20 seconds:
 - Before, during, and after preparing food (especially after touching raw food)
 - Before eating food
 - After using the toilet
 - After changing diapers or cleaning up a child who has used the toilet
 - After touching an animal or animal waste
- If soap and water are not available, use an alcohol-based hand sanitizer.
- Rinse all fresh fruits and vegetables under running water before cooking, packing or eating.
- Wash all surfaces and utensils with warm, soapy water before and after use.

Separate!

- Keep juices from raw meat, poultry, or fish from coming in contact with other foods, cooked or raw. These juices contain germs!
- Use separate plates for raw and cooked meat, fish, or poultry (do not put cooked or ready-to-eat food on the same plate used for raw foods unless the plate is thoroughly cleaned).
- If possible, use one dedicated cutting board for meat or poultry and one dedicated cutting board for ready-to-eat food.
- Do not reuse utensils that have touched raw foods unless you wash them with soap and water.

Cook!

- Thaw food in the refrigerator or microwave, not on the counter.
- Check expiration dates of meats, chicken, fish, shellfish, milk and other products.
- Use a food thermometer to make sure food is at a safe internal temperature.
- Ground meat (such as hamburger) should be cooked to 160°F and fresh beef, veal, or lamb steaks to 145°F with a 3 minutes rest period (after removing your meat from the heat source, let it sit for 3 minutes. Your meat will continue to cook during this time, helping to kill any remaining germs). Chicken should reach a temperature of 165°F and fish should cook to 145°F or until it is opaque and separates easily. Shellfish should be closed tightly before cooking and cooked until their shells open. Cook eggs until yolks and whites are firm, do not eat “runny” eggs.
- Do not interrupt cooking by partially cooking food and then finishing later.
- If you are served undercooked food in a restaurant, send it back for further cooking.
- Do not use unpasteurized milk or other dairy products (such as cheese).
- When serving, keep hot foods hot and cold foods cold.

What if I have *Campylobacter*?

Most infected people may return to work or school once their diarrhea has resolved, provided they carefully wash their hands after using the bathroom. Keep in mind it is possible to give the bacteria to others even after feeling better. In order to protect the public, workers in Boston who handle food and health care workers must be cleared by the Boston Public Health Commission before returning to work.

