



CAMPYLOBACTER

What is Campylobacter?

Campylobacter infection is caused by a group of bacteria called *Campylobacter*. These bacteria are found worldwide thus including New Brunswick. They live in the intestines of infected people and animals. The bacteria cause gastrointestinal illness and are passed in the feces. Campylobacter bacteria are one of the most common causes of diarrhea.

What are the symptoms?

Symptoms usually appear within two to five days after a person becomes infected with the bacteria. Most persons who become ill have diarrhea, stomach cramps, nausea, vomiting and fever. Symptoms usually last a week. In some persons, serious illness can develop.

How is Campylobacter spread?

Campylobacter bacteria are passed in the feces of infected persons and animals. The bacteria can be found in soil, food, water or on surfaces contaminated with feces. The bacteria are spread by animal to person contact, by eating contaminated food or by drinking contaminated water; less common is by person to person contact. Most cases are associated with improperly handling or eating raw or undercooked poultry. Campylobacter bacteria can also be spread by contact of cooked foods with raw poultry on unwashed cutting boards or knives.

Some examples of how the bacteria can be spread:

- Eating undercooked poultry;
- Drinking unpasteurized milk;
- Young children touching poultry packages in shopping carts and then placing fingers in mouth.

How is Campylobacter infection diagnosed?

Diagnosis of infection is based on assessment of clinical symptoms by a health care provider and laboratory testing of a stool sample.

Who is at risk of Campylobacter infection?

Anyone exposed to the bacteria can become infected. Young children, the elderly and persons with weakened immune systems are at a greater risk of developing more serious disease. Most people will recover without specific treatment.

How can Campylobacter infection be prevented?

Use good environmental management. Flush or discard any stool in the toilet and clean surrounding area using hot water and detergent. A chlorine-based disinfectant is recommended.

Practice good personal hygiene. Wash hands thoroughly with soap and water after: using the toilet or changing a diaper; handling animals or contact with animal feces; handling raw poultry and meats; and before preparing or eating food.

Take food safety precautions. Wash and/or peel all raw vegetables and fruits before eating. Thoroughly cook all meats (meat, poultry and seafood). Prevent contact of cooked foods with raw poultry and other meat. Drink and eat only pasteurized dairy products (milk, cheese, yogurt and ice cream).

Drink properly treated water. Avoid swallowing recreational waters from swimming pools and hot tubs. Do not drink untreated surface water from lakes or streams. Test private well drinking water regularly (once or twice per year).

How is Campylobacter infection treated?

Persons with diarrhea should: drink plenty of liquids to avoid dehydration; stay home when ill; and practice good personal hygiene like hand washing. Avoid preparing food for others while you have symptoms and for 48 hours after you recover. Consult a health care provider for advice and treatment if bloody or severe diarrhea occurs; sometimes prescription medicines can be used.

What is the Public Health response?

Health care providers and laboratories are required to confidentially notify cases to Public Health. Public Health staff may investigate to find out how the infection occurred, identify other people who may be at risk of infection, implement control measures, and provide advice as necessary; including exclusion of infected workers in high risk occupations like persons involved in food handling, direct patient care, and care of the young (daycare) or the elderly (institutional settings).

Further Information

Please contact your health care provider, local [Public Health office](#), or Telecare 811.

Useful websites:

Public Health Agency of Canada
<http://www.phac-aspc.gc.ca/>

Health Canada
<http://www.hc-sc.gc.ca>