

Campylobacter bacteria

What is it?

Campylobacter bacteria are the most common food borne illness in the UK. They are found in the guts of many types of animals and birds.

What are the symptoms?

The symptoms may vary, but yours may have included:

- diarrhoea – occasionally bloody;
- stomach pain - which can be confused with appendicitis;
- fever;
- general tiredness and lack of energy; and
- vomiting, but this is rare.

Symptoms usually start 2-5 days after infection with the bacteria.

What about the mess?

- if you have to clear up diarrhoea or other mess, take care and wear rubber gloves. Scoop up what you can with a dustpan or paper towel. Rinse down a WC, don't use a sink that is used for food preparation or washing up. Wash what is left with cloths, and warm soapy water. Pour dirty water down a WC afterwards. Clean all cloths and equipment with dilute bleach (1 eggcup in a small bucket of warm (not hot) water);
- wash soiled sheets and clothing straight away. Fold them so that you don't touch the dirty parts. Wash on as hot a wash as possible. Do not over fill the washing machine.

How did I catch it?

The usual way is eating or drinking something containing Campylobacter particularly:

- raw and undercooked meat, poultry, and shellfish;
- untreated or "bird pecked" milk;
- untreated water; and
- contaminated ready-to-eat food.

It can also be caught from handling infected animals such as pets. People and animals can carry Campylobacter without showing any symptoms.

How long does it last?

Symptoms can last several days but are usually gone after 2 or 3.

How is it treated?

There is not a specific treatment for Campylobacter. It is unlikely that doctors will prescribe antibiotics.

It is important to keep drinking (clear fluids such as water or dilute squash are a good idea) to stop dehydration.

Can I give it to someone else?

Person to person spread is rare but as the organism appears in faeces, hands that are not washed after using the toilet or changing nappies can spread the infection.

When can I go back to work/ school/ nursery?

If you;

- work with food
- are under 5 years of age and attend a nursery or playgroup
- care for elderly or vulnerable people

you must not return to work or school until your symptoms have gone and then you have had 48 hours clear of symptoms. Your Council's Environmental Health team will be able to advise you further.

What can I do to prevent getting it again?

1. Food

- If you are ill avoid preparing food for yourself or others;
- make sure all risky foods such as mince and burgers are thoroughly cooked. Make sure there is no pink meat present;
- be careful not to spread the organism from raw to ready to- eat food such as cold meats and salad;
- clean and disinfect worktops after preparing raw meat; and
- make sure your fridge and freezer are working properly. The temperatures should be 1-4°C and minus 18°C respectively (if you do not have a fridge thermometer, why not buy one).

2. Wash your hands

Everyone in the household should take care to wash their hands properly with soap and rinse them under running water:

- after using the toilet;
- after you've cleared up diarrhoea;
- after you've been nursing ill people;
- after you've handled laundry or changed nappies;
- before you cook or eat; and
- often during the preparation of food (especially after handling raw meat).

An antibacterial soap is an additional precaution.

For further information please contact:

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