

CAMPYLOBACTERIOSIS Q&A

What is campylobacteriosis?

Campylobacteriosis is a bacterial infection that affects the intestinal tract and, rarely, the bloodstream. It is a common cause of bacterial diarrhea in Georgia. Most cases are seen in the summer months and occur as single cases or as part of recognized outbreaks.

Who gets campylobacteriosis?

Any person may get a *Campylobacter* infection, but children under 5 years old and young adults between 15-29 years old are more frequently affected than other age groups.

How are Campylobacter bacteria spread?

Campylobacter are generally spread by eating or drinking contaminated food, water or unpasteurized milk. Occasionally, people get *Campylobacter* through contact with infected people, pets, or farm animals.

What are the symptoms of campylobacteriosis?

People infected with *Campylobacter* may experience mild or severe diarrhea, often with traces of blood in the stool. Other symptoms include abdominal cramps, malaise, fever, nausea, and vomiting. Some infected individuals may have no symptoms.

How soon do symptoms appear after exposure?

The symptoms generally appear two to five days after exposure but can be delayed as long as 10 days. The length of time depends upon the amount of *Campylobacter* bacteria ingested.

Where are the Campylobacter bacteria found?

Many animals carry the bacteria in their intestines. Poultry and cattle are frequent carriers, but other animals include puppies, kittens, other pets, swine, sheep, rodents and birds. These sources in turn may contaminate meat products, water supplies, milk and other items in the food chain.

When and for how long is a person able to spread the Campylobacter bacteria?

Infected people may continue to pass the bacteria in their

feces from several days to several weeks. Certain antibiotics may shorten the carrier state.

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

Since *Campylobacter* are in the feces, only people with active diarrhea who are unable to control their bowel habits (infants, young children, certain handicapped individuals, etc.) should be isolated. Most infected people may return to work or school when their stools become formed provided that they carefully wash their hands after toilet visits. Food handlers, health care workers and children in day care centers must obtain the approval of the local or state health department before returning to their routine activities.

What is the treatment for campylobacteriosis?

Most people infected with *Campylobacter* will recover on their own or require only fluids to prevent dehydration. Antibiotics are occasionally used to treat severe cases or to shorten the carrier state, which may be important for food handlers, children in day care and health care workers.

How can campylobacteriosis be prevented?

1. Always treat raw poultry, beef and pork as if they are contaminated and handle accordingly:
 - Wrap fresh meats in plastic bags at the market to prevent blood from dripping on other foods.
 - Refrigerate foods promptly; minimize holding time at room temperature.
 - Cutting boards and counters used for meat preparation should be washed immediately after use to prevent cross contamination with other foods.
 - Avoid eating raw or undercooked meats.
 - Ensure that the correct internal cooking temperature is reached, particularly when

using a microwave. Make sure that the meat is no longer pink and that any juices run clear.

2. Avoid eating raw eggs or undercooking foods containing raw eggs.
3. Avoid drinking unpasteurized milk and untreated surface water.
4. Encourage careful hand washing with soap and water before and after food preparation.
5. Make sure children wash their hands carefully with soap and water, particularly those children who handle pets such as puppies and kittens.

Where can I get additional information on campylobacteriosis?

Contact the Georgia Division of Public Health, Epidemiology Branch, by email at gaepinfo@dhr.state.ga.us. The following web sites may be useful:

- CDC *Campylobacter* Fact Sheet – http://www.cdc.gov/ncidod/dbmd/diseaseinfo/campylobacter_g.htm
- FDA Bad Bug Book – <http://vm.cfsan.fda.gov/~mow/chap4.html>

