

Campylobacter infection



Campylobacter infection (campylobacteriosis) is a bacterial infection which most commonly causes gastroenteritis (also known as 'gastro') but may also cause illness affecting the entire body.



***Campylobacter* infection is a notifiable condition¹**

How *Campylobacter* infection is spread

Eating contaminated food is the most frequent cause of this infection. *Campylobacter* is commonly found in raw or undercooked poultry meat. Occasional other sources of infection include:

- > infected individuals, particularly infants
- > household pets, especially puppies and kittens
- > domestic stock
- > raw milk
- > contaminated water.

Signs and symptoms

Symptoms may include:

- > diarrhoea which may sometimes be bloody
- > fever
- > stomach cramps.

Vomiting is not common. The most severe infections occur in the very young, the elderly and malnourished people.

Rarely, *Campylobacter* infection may lead to Guillain-Barré syndrome, a condition which causes muscular paralysis.

Diagnosis

Diagnosis is made by growing *Campylobacter* bacteria from a faecal specimen or by detecting the bacteria in a faecal sample using a PCR (polymerase chain reaction) test in a pathology laboratory.

Incubation period

(time between becoming infected and developing symptoms)

Usually 2 to 5 days, with a range of 1 to 10 days.

Infectious period

(time during which an infected person can infect others)

A person is infectious for as long as the *Campylobacter* bacteria are in their faeces, which may be for an average of 2 to 3 weeks after symptoms are gone. The risk of infecting others decreases when diarrhoea is no longer present.

Treatment

Antibiotic treatment is not usually needed for *Campylobacter* infection. Recovery from symptoms usually occurs within a few days.

The following are general recommendations for the treatment of gastroenteritis:

- > Give plenty of fluids. Oral rehydration solution is highly recommended for children with mild to moderate dehydration. It is available at pharmacies and should be administered following the instructions on the packaging.
- > Mildly unwell children should be given their usual fluids more often. Carbonated (fizzy) drinks or undiluted juice should be avoided.
- > Medicines to prevent vomiting or diarrhoea should not be given (especially in children), except where specifically advised by a doctor.

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- > Breastfed babies should continue to be breastfed throughout their illness.
- > Children on formula or solid diets should restart their normal diet (including full strength lactose containing milk) following rehydration with oral rehydration solution.
- > Children who are hungry or ask for food should be given small portions of their usual foods, but avoid foods high in sugar or fat.

When to seek medical advice

Seek medical advice if there are any of the following symptoms:

Adults

- > Signs of dehydration, such as thirst and decreased urination, lethargy, dry mouth, feeling faint on standing
- > fever
- > severe abdominal pain
- > bloody diarrhoea.

Children

- > Signs of dehydration, such as thirst and decreased urination, lethargy, dry mouth, sunken eyes, feeling faint on standing
- > fever
- > abdominal pain
- > bloody diarrhoea
- > any symptoms in a child less than 12 months of age.

Prevention

- > Exclude people with *Campylobacter* from childcare, preschool, school and work until there has been no diarrhoea for 24 hours. If working as a food handler in a food business, the exclusion period should be until there has been no diarrhoea or vomiting for 48 hours.
- > Infants, children and adults with *Campylobacter* infection should not swim until there has been no diarrhoea

for 24 hours.

- > Wash hands after handling raw meat, especially poultry, and keep food preparation areas clean.
- > Wash hands after gardening or touching animals.
- > Meat, particularly poultry, should be thoroughly cooked.
- > Do not store uncooked poultry or other meat near foods which will be eaten raw, such as salad items.
- > If pets are sick with diarrhoeal illness, have them treated.
- > Babies and small children without diarrhoea who are not toilet trained should wear tight fitting waterproof pants or swimming nappies in swimming pools and be changed regularly in the change room. When faecal accidents occur, swimming pools should be properly disinfected.

Useful links

Food safety www.sahealth.sa.gov.au/foodsafety

- > Pasteurised milk vs raw milk
- > Preventing food poisoning at home
- > Shopping and storing of food at home
- > Thawing, cooking, cooling and reheating food

SA Health website www.sahealth.sa.gov.au

- > Collecting a faecal sample
- > Exclusion periods from childcare, preschool, school and work
- > Hand hygiene
- > Keeping areas clean
- > When you have a notifiable condition

¹ In South Australia the law requires doctors and laboratories to report some infections or diseases to SA Health. These infections or diseases are commonly referred to as 'notifiable conditions'

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You've Got What? 5th Edition

Communicable Disease Control Branch

Telephone: 1300 232 272 Email: HealthCommunicableDiseases@sa.gov.au

The SA Health Disclaimer for this resource is located at www.sahealth.sa.gov.au/youvegotwhat



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*SA Health Safety and Quality Community Advisory Group



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