

Fact Sheet

Campylobacteriosis

Also Known As: Campylobacter Jejuni or “Sick Puppy Syndrome”



What is Campylobacteriosis?

Campylobacter is one of the most common causes of diarrheal illness in the United States. Most cases occur as isolated, sporadic events, not as part of recognized outbreaks. Active surveillance through the Foodborne Diseases Active Surveillance Network (FoodNet) indicates that about 14 cases are diagnosed each year for each 100,000 persons in the population. Many more cases go undiagnosed or unreported, and campylobacteriosis is estimated to affect over 1.3 million persons every year. Campylobacteriosis occurs much more frequently in the summer months than in the winter. The organism is isolated from infants and young adults more frequently than from persons in other age groups and from males more frequently than females. Although *Campylobacter* infection does not commonly cause death, it has been estimated that approximately 76 persons with *Campylobacter* infections die each year.

Spread of Disease



Campylobacteriosis usually occurs in single, sporadic cases, but it can also occur in outbreaks, when a number of people become ill at one time. Most cases of it are associated with handling raw poultry or eating undercooked poultry meat. A very small number of campylobacter organisms can cause illness in humans.

Even one drop of juice from raw chicken meat can infect a person. One way to become infected is to cut poultry meat on a cutting board, and then use unwashed cutting board or utensil to prepare vegetables or other raw or lightly cooked foods. The organism is not usually spread from person-to-person, but this can happen if the infected person is a small child or is producing a large volume of diarrhea.

Larger outbreaks due to *campylobacter* are not usually associated with raw poultry but are usually related to contaminated water. Animals can also be infected, and some people have acquired their infection from contact with the infected stool of an ill dog or cat.

Many chicken flocks are infected but show no signs of illness. *Campylobacter* can easily spread from bird to bird through a common water source or through contact with infected feces. When an infected bird is slaughtered, *campylobacter* can be transferred from the intestines to the meat. More than 50% of the raw chicken in the United States market has *campylobacter* on it.

Signs and Symptoms

Most people who become ill with campylobacteriosis get diarrhea, cramping, abdominal pain, and fever within two to five days after exposure to the organism. The diarrhea may be bloody and can be accompanied by nausea and vomiting. The illness typically lasts one week. Some persons who are infected with *campylobacter* don't have any symptoms at all. In persons with compromised immune systems, *campylobacter* occasionally spreads to the bloodstream and causes a serious life-threatening infection.

Diagnosis

Many different kinds of infections can cause diarrhea and bloody diarrhea. Diagnosis of *campylobacter* requires special laboratory culture procedures, which doctors may have to request specifically.

Treatment

Virtually all people infected with *campylobacter* will recover without any specific treatment. Patients should drink plenty of fluids as long as the diarrhea lasts. In more severe cases, antibiotics may be used and can shorten the duration of symptoms if they are given early in the illness.

Prevention

There is simple food handling practice for preventing *campylobacter* infections:

- Cook all poultry products thoroughly. Make sure that the meat is cooked throughout (no longer pink), juices run clear, and the inside is cooked to 170°F (77°C) for breast meat, and 180°F (82°C) for thigh meat.
- Wash hands with soap before and after handling raw foods of animal origin.
- Use separate cutting boards for foods of animal origin and other foods. Carefully clean all cutting boards, countertops, and utensils with soap and hot water.
- Do not consume un-pasteurized milk and untreated surface water, especially when traveling out of the country.
- Make sure that persons with diarrhea, especially children, wash their hands carefully and frequently with soap to reduce the risk of spreading the infection.
- Wash hands carefully with soap after having contact with pet or animal feces.



For more sources of information on this topic visit:

ST. CLAIR COUNTY HEALTH DEPARTMENT www.scchealth.co

CENTERS FOR DISEASE CONTROL AND PREVENTION www.cdc.gov

MICHIGAN DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH AND HUMAN SERVICES www.michigan.gov/mdhhs