BC EMERGENCY MEDICINE NETWORK

PATIENT APPROVED

This material has been reviewed and approved by the patient partners with the Patient Voices Network.

Campylobacter Infection

Campylobacter is a bacteria that infects the intestinal tract, and very rarely can also infect the blood stream. When a person gets sick from this infection it is called campylobacteriosis.

Campylobacter is a common cause of diarrhea worldwide and is the most commonly reported enteric (intestinal) disease in B.C.

Campylobacter infection is usually self-limited, which means it usually ends without treatment.
Symptoms may include:

+ Mild to severe diarrhea.
+ Bloody diarrhea.
+ Nausea.
+ Stomach pain.
+ Fever.
+ Vomiting.

Symptoms start an average of 2 to 5 days (range 1 to 10 days) after exposure to the bacteria and usually last for less than 1 week.

You can be infected and have no symptoms. In some cases symptoms may continue for more than 10 days, and occasionally symptoms can return after you have started to get better.

Although extremely rare, immunologic conditions have been associated with Campylobatcterosis, such as arthritis and Guillain-Barré. This is important to know about but is not something to worry about as it is unlikely you will get these. Only 1 or 2 in 100,000 people in a year are affected by Guillain-Barré.

HOW IS A CAMPYLOBACTER INFECTION DIAGNOSED AND TREATED?

Campylobacter infection is diagnosed by testing a stool (bowel movement) sample.

Antibiotics are sometimes used to treat a Campylobacter infection. Your health care provider will decide if treatment is necessary. People with Campylobacter are advised to drink fluids to prevent dehydration from diarrhea.

HOW CAN I BECOME INFECTED WITH CAMPYLOBACTER?

Campylobacter is spread by the fecal-oral route, which is when contaminated feces are ingested. Campylobacter live in the intestines of many animals including chickens, cows, pigs, sheep, dogs, cats, and humans. When animals are slaughtered for food, bacteria from an animal's intestines may contaminate the meat that we eat.

Common sources of infection include undercooked poultry and meats, unpasteurized milk, food and water contaminated with fecal material, and animals including pets and farm animals.

During food preparation, bacteria can be transmitted from contaminated foods to other foods or surfaces in the kitchen. This is called cross-contamination. An example of this would be cutting raw meat on a cutting board and then cutting vegetables on the same board without washing and then sanitizing the board in

between. When cross-contaminated, uncooked foods such as fresh fruit and vegetables, and ready-to-eat foods such as sandwich meats carry a greater risk of illness.

Drinking water can also be contaminated if human feces or animal waste contaminates water sources such as: streams, rivers, lakes or shallow wells, and if this water is not treated properly.

HOW CAN I PREVENT CAMPYLOBACTER INFECTION?

It is important to be aware of the risks with the food products you buy, and know how to prepare your food safely. Handle and prepare all raw poultry and meat as if they are contaminated. Make sure to practice good hand hygiene, including regular hand washing which can protect you from many infections including Campylobacter. If you have diarrhea or other symptoms of Campylobacter, you should not handle or prepare food for others.

To handle and prepare food safely:

+ Refrigerate foods right away. Keep raw meat well wrapped and on lower refrigerator shelves so blood does not drip onto other foods.
+ Thaw poultry and meat in the refrigerator, microwave, or under cold running water, and not at room temperature.
+ **DO NOT** eat raw or undercooked poultry or meats.
+ Make sure poultry and meats are well cooked by using a meat thermometer. Measure the internal temperature of the meat by putting the thermometer into the thickest part of the meat.
  - The minimum internal temperature for poultry is 74° C (165° F) and for other meats is 71° C (160° F).

+ Avoid direct contact between raw meats and other uncooked foods.
+ When cooking or barbequing, use separate plates and utensils for raw and cooked poultry and meat.
+ Use a separate cutting board for raw meats. If a separate cutting board is not available, cut all other ingredients first before cutting raw meats.
+ Wash and sanitize items that do not go in the dishwasher such as cutting boards, utensils, counters, kitchen sinks and tap handles. Follow these steps:
  - Wash items with warm, soapy water.
  - Rinse items with warm, plain water.
  - Sanitize with a mild bleach solution – 5ml (1teaspoon) of bleach in 1 litre (4 ¼ cups) of water. Immerse items in the solution or spray solution onto surfaces and soak for at least 2 minutes to kill any bacteria.

Additional ways to reduce the risk of infection:

+ Wash your hands with soap and warm running water at a sink and dry hands with disposable single-use towels. Always wash your hands:
  - before eating.
  - before handling food.
  - right after handling raw poultry or meat, and before touching anything else.
  - after using the toilet or changing diapers.
  - after touching pets or farm animals. If the animal is sick with diarrhea, bring it to a veterinarian for treatment.
+ **DO NOT** eat raw unpasteurized eggs or uncooked foods made with raw unpasteurized eggs.
+ **DO NOT** drink unpasteurized milk or juices.
+ If a Boil Water Advisory has been issued for your community water system, follow the instructions provided in the advisory.

+ **DO NOT** drink untreated surface water from a spring, stream, river, lake, pond or shallow well. Assume it is contaminated with animal waste. If you do use this type of water, boil or disinfect it for drinking, making ice cubes, washing uncooked fruits and vegetables, making baby formula, brushing teeth, and washing dentures or contact lenses. For more information on disinfecting water, visit the link provided in Relevant Resources section.

+ Make sure children, especially those who handle pets, wash their hands carefully before eating and on a regular basis if they suck their thumbs or put their hands in their mouths.

WHAT SHOULD I DO IF I BECOME INFECTED WITH CAMPYLOBACTER INFECTION?

If you think you have a Campylobacter infection, see your health care provider for testing, advice and treatment. Once diagnosed with Campylobacter infection, your attending physician may advise the following:

+ As Campylobacter is passed through human feces or animal waste, if you cannot control your bowel movements, you should not go to work or school.

+ If you are a food handler, health care worker or work in or attend a daycare, it is possible for you to transmit Campylobacter to others in these settings.

+ **DO NOT** work while you have diarrhea or vomiting and do not return to work or daycare until at least 48 hours (or as instructed by your physician) after your last loose stool or episode of vomiting. This time period will ensure you have a chance to recover and

+ lessen the possibility of transmitting the infection to others.

Children in daycare who have diarrhea or vomiting can be cared for temporarily in an area separate from other children until picked up by their parents. To ensure proper hand washing, children in a daycare should be supervised by an adult when washing their hands. For more information on handwashing, see Resources.

RELEVANT RESOURCES

+ To learn more about disinfecting water, visit the link: https://www.healthlinkbc.ca/healthlinkbc-files/disinfecting-drinking-water/

+ To learn more about handwashing, visit the link: www.healthlinkbc.ca/healthlinkbc-files/hand-washing

TO LEARN MORE ASK

+ Your family doctor.
+ HealthLinkBC - call 8-1-1 (7-1-1 for deaf or hard of hearing) or go online to www.HealthLinkBC.ca

RECOMMENDED FOLLOW UP

☐ Follow up with your primary care provider in ____ days.

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Find this information sheet on the BC Emergency Medicine Network website: www.bcemergencynetwork.ca/clinical_resource/campylobacter-infection/

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