

Campylobacter

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What is campylobacteriosis?

Campylobacteriosis is an infectious disease caused by the *Campylobacter* bacteria. It is one of the most common causes of diarrheal illness in Australia. Nearly all cases are isolated, sporadic events, not large outbreaks.

Campylobacteriosis occurs more frequently in summer - infants and young adults are more susceptible.

What are the symptoms?

Diarrhoea, cramping, abdominal pain, and fever within two to five days after exposure. Diarrhoea may be bloody and 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.

Most people recover completely within two to five days, although recovery can take up to ten days.

What are the causes?

Campylobacter jejuni is often found in birds, which carry it without becoming ill. As a consequence, it may be present on raw poultry for human consumption. Indeed, many *campylobacteriosis* cases are due to handling raw poultry or eating raw or undercooked poultry meat. *Campylobacter* is commonly found on raw chickens.

A very small number of *Campylobacter* organisms (fewer than 500) can cause illness in humans. Just one drop of juice from raw chicken can infect a person. Avoiding cross-contamination when preparing raw poultry can help prevent infection.

Larger outbreaks due to *Campylobacter* are not usually associated with raw poultry, but usually related to drinking unpasteurised milk or contaminated water. Animals can also be infected, and some people have been infected after contact with the infected stool of an ill dog or cat.

How can the risk of infection be minimised?

- Cook all poultry products thoroughly. Make sure the meat is cooked throughout (no longer pink), and any juices run clear.
- Store raw foods (such as meat and chicken) in sealed containers in the bottom of the fridge or freezer to prevent any fluid dripping or spilling onto other ready-to eat food. Cover all foods in the refrigerator and freezer to protect them from contamination.

- Wash your hands in hot soapy water and dry thoroughly before preparing food, and after touching raw meat and chicken.
- Use separate cutting boards for raw meat and chicken and other foods to prevent cross-contamination in the kitchen.
- Carefully clean all cutting boards, work surfaces and utensils after preparing raw meat or chicken.
- *Campylobacter* is a type of bacteria which can grow between 30°C and 45°C, this is within the commonly referred to "temperature danger zone" (5°C and 60°C). Keep cold food in the fridge until you are ready to cook or serve; serve hot foods steaming hot.