**Campylobacter jejuni**

**What is Campylobacter?**
Campylobacter jejuni is a species of bacterium that causes foodborne illness. It is one of the most common causes of diarrheal illnesses in the United States. The infectious disease caused by this bacterium is called campylobacteriosis.

**Campylobacter is very common:** Campylobacter species are believed to be the third leading cause of domestically acquired bacterial foodborne illness in the United States. It is responsible for more than 845,000 illnesses per year in the United States resulting in an annual cost of 1.747 million dollars.

**Sources of Campylobacter:** Campylobacter is found in the intestinal tract of many warm-blooded animals. It is common in raw chicken and has been found in other meats, seafoods and vegetables. Campylobacter infections can also be contracted from drinking raw milk, traveling to foreign countries, drinking untreated water from mountain streams or contact with infected dogs and cats. The foods that are most often associated with campylobacteriosis are poultry, unpasteurized (raw) milk and untreated water. Flocks of chickens may become infected and exhibit no signs of illness. The bacteria can then be transferred to poultry meat during the slaughtering process. Cows that become infected may transfer Campylobacter to their milk from infected utters or when their milk comes into contact with feces. Surface waters can become polluted with Campylobacter when exposed to the feces of infected wildlife.

**Symptoms:** The most common symptoms of campylobacteriosis are diarrhea (may be bloody), cramps, fever, nausea and vomiting. Some people who become infected never experience symptoms. Those who do become sick will likely notice symptoms within two to five days of exposure to the bacteria. Symptoms normally persist for 2 – 5 days but it can take up to 10 days to fully recover. For people with compromised immune systems, Campylobacter occasionally spreads to the bloodstream and causes serious life-threatening infection.

**Prevention:** Campylobacter bacteria do not usually grow and multiply in foods but the presence of small amounts can make you sick. One drop of juice from raw chicken can have enough Campylobacter cells to cause illness. The following safety precautions can help prevent infection:

- Cook poultry to a minimum internal temperature of 165°F. A meat thermometer is the most reliable way to confirm the correct temperature.
- Thoroughly wash anything that comes in contact with raw poultry including: hands, knives, utensils, cutting boards and kitchen counters.
- Avoid drinking unpasteurized (raw) milk.
- Don’t drink untreated surface waters.
- Avoid cross-contamination of ready-to-eat foods with raw meats and their juices.

For more information on safe cooking practices see: **HGIC 3500, Basics of Safe Food Handling.**

**Treatment:** Most people do not require any specific treatment to fully recover from campylobacteriosis. However, drinking extra fluids while diarrhea lasts is advised to help avoid becoming dehydrated. People with compromised immune systems may be prescribed antimicrobial therapy for severe cases.
Long-term consequences: Recovery from Campylobacter can take up to 10 days but most people will fully recover within two to five days. In rare cases long-term health problems may occur. Some people may develop arthritis or a rare condition called Guillain-Barre syndrome triggered by campylobacteriosis. A health care provider should be contacted for concerns related to long-term problems.

For more information on foodborne bacteria see: HGIC 3740, Foodborne Illnesses: Bacteria

Sources:


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