



Campylobacter infection

What is *Campylobacter* infection?

Campylobacter infection (also known as campylobacteriosis) is an infection of the digestive tract (or gut), caused by *Campylobacter* bacteria.

Around half of all reported bacterial gastrointestinal infections in Western Australia are due to *Campylobacter* infection.

How do I get *Campylobacter* infection?

Campylobacter can be found in the gut and faeces (poo) of animals and is commonly found in or on raw poultry.

You become infected with *Campylobacter* by taking in the bacteria through your mouth. This can be by:

- eating contaminated, undercooked meat, especially chicken
- drinking contaminated water or unpasteurised milk
- eating food (such as salad) that has been cross-contaminated with *Campylobacter* from raw meats/poultry
- handling young pets, other animals, raw meat and pet meat
- person-to-person spread. Although less common, this can still happen when there is contact with microscopic amounts of faeces from an ill person. Such spread may occur directly by close personal contact, or indirectly by touching contaminated surfaces such as taps, toilet flush buttons, toys and nappies.

Signs and symptoms

Symptoms start 1 to 10 days (usually 2 to 5 days) after you have taken in the bacteria and usually last for 3 to 6 days.

Symptoms can include:

- diarrhoea (which may also contain mucus and/or blood)
- stomach cramps (may be similar to appendicitis pain)
- nausea (feeling sick)
- vomiting
- fever.

How do I know if I have *Campylobacter* infection?

There are many causes of gastroenteritis, and laboratory testing of a faecal specimen is necessary to confirm that symptoms are due to *Campylobacter* infection.

Treatment of *Campylobacter* infection

People with confirmed or suspected *Campylobacter* infection should:

- Drink plenty of fluids such as plain water or oral rehydration drinks (available from pharmacies) to avoid dehydration. Dehydration is especially dangerous for babies and the elderly.
- Avoid anti-vomiting or anti-diarrhoeal medications unless prescribed or recommended by a doctor.
- If you experience severe or prolonged symptoms you should visit a doctor.

While you have the infection

- Do not go to work or school for at least 24 hours after symptoms have finished, or 48 hours if you work in or attend a high risk setting, such as health-care, residential



care or child-care, or handle food as part of your job.

- Wash and dry your hands thoroughly after going to the toilet.
- Avoid preparing or handling food for other people until symptoms have resolved. If you must prepare or handle food, thoroughly wash your hands beforehand to reduce the risk of spreading the infection to others.
- Immediately remove and wash any clothes or bedding contaminated with vomit or diarrhoea using detergent and hot water.
- After an episode of diarrhoea or vomiting, clean contaminated surfaces (for example benches, floors and toilets) immediately using detergent and hot water. Then disinfect surfaces using a bleach-based product diluted according to the manufacturer's instructions.
- Clean carpet or soft furnishings contaminated with diarrhoea or vomit immediately using detergent and hot water and then steam clean.

How can *Campylobacter* infection be prevented?

- Avoid contact with people who have gastroenteritis symptoms.
- Wash and dry your hands thoroughly after changing nappies, going to the toilet, cleaning up vomit or diarrhoea, or handling animals, and before eating or drinking. If hand-washing facilities are not available use an alcohol-based gel.
- Raw meats and poultry can contain *Campylobacter* bacteria. Keep raw foods separate from cooked and ready-to-eat foods (for example salads) to prevent cross-contamination. Store raw meat below ready-to-eat food in the refrigerator and use separate chopping boards and knives for

raw and ready-to-eat foods.

- Cook meat and poultry thoroughly to a temperature of 75°C or until meat juices run clear and are not pink.
- Keep cold food below 5°C and hot food above 60°C.
- Animal faeces can contaminate children's sandpits. Cover sandpits when not in use.

When travelling

When [travelling to developing countries](#), especially in Asia, the Pacific islands, Africa, the Middle East and Central and South America you should avoid:

- salads
- raw or cold seafood, including shellfish
- raw or runny eggs
- cold meat
- unpasteurised milk and dairy products (including ice-cream)
- ice in drinks and flavoured ice blocks.

Fruit that you peel yourself is usually safe. Remember - 'cook it, boil it, peel it, or leave it'.

Use bottled water or disinfect water (by boiling, chemical treatment or purifiers) for drinking and brushing teeth.

Where to get help

- See your doctor.
- Visit a GP after hours.
- Ring healthdirect Australia on 1800 022 222.

Remember

- Safe food preparation and thorough cooking, and washing your hands after contact with raw meats and animals can help prevent *Campylobacter* infection.



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See also

- [Gastroenteritis](#)
- [Food safety tips](#)

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