

Campylobacter

Information leaflet

What is Campylobacter?

Campylobacter is the commonest cause of food poisoning infection affecting people in Scotland. Campylobacter is a type of bacteria (germ).

What symptoms does it cause?

Campylobacter can cause:

- diarrhoea (sometimes containing blood or mucus);
- stomach ache or cramps;
- fever
- occasionally vomiting

The time taken from swallowing the bacteria until illness develops is usually three to five days but can vary between one to ten days.

The illness normally lasts a few days and most people will recover without having any treatment. However, a small number of people may have longer lasting symptoms.

There is normally no special treatment except to drink plenty of water and rest until you feel better.

In severe illness, antibiotic therapy may be given. Your GP will provide advice on this.

Should I see my GP?

You should consult your GP if one or more of the following applies to you:

- There is blood in your diarrhoea
- You have severe abdominal pain
- The diarrhoea has lasted more than 48 hours

Who can it affect?

Campylobacter can affect anyone. However, the very young and elderly are particularly vulnerable.

Where does campylobacter come from?

Campylobacter can be found in the gut of many birds and animals, including cattle and domestic pets such as dogs. It grows best at the body temperature of birds, so many poultry such as chickens carry it, without being ill themselves.

How is it spread?

Humans can catch this infection by:

- eating raw or undercooked meat (particularly poultry such as chicken and turkey), or by eating foods that has been in contact with these.
- contact with worktops and equipment used to prepare raw meat.
- drinking water or unpasteurised milk that has the bacteria in it;
- not washing hands after handling raw poultry, contact with farm animals or infected pets and before eating or putting hands in the mouth (this can be a particular problem in small children).

How can infection be prevented?

- Keep cooked and uncooked food separate in the kitchen.
- Ensure raw food is stored below cooked or 'ready to eat' food in the fridge.
- Make sure meat is fully thawed before cooking.
- Cook all food (especially meat) properly. Take particular care with poultry, pork, burgers and sausages, ensuring that the juices run clear. Always check barbecued food is cooked properly.
- Clean work surfaces, dishes and utensils thoroughly in hot water and detergent after they have been in contact with raw meat.
- Use separate chopping boards for raw meat and ready to eat foods.
- Keep pets away from food, dishes and worktops.
- Only drink pasteurised milk and avoid drinking untreated water – for example, from streams.
- Always wash hands thoroughly with soap and warm water and dry with a clean towel:
 - after using the toilet;
 - after changing a baby's nappy;
 - after contact with pets and animals, including gardening or outdoor sports;
 - Before preparing and eating food; and
 - after handling raw food.

If someone in your household has campylobacter

- The infected person should not prepare food
- The infected person should not share towels/flannels with anyone
- Wash all clothes, bedding and towels from an infected person in the washing machine at the hottest cycle possible for the type of clothing.
- Clean toilet seats, toilet bowls, flush handles, taps and wash hand basins after use with hot soapy water followed by bleach diluted to the manufacturer's instructions.
- If cleaning up diarrhoea or vomit wear rubber gloves; Use paper towels or a disposable cloth to remove as much material as possible. Wash the surface with hot soapy water, rinse and allow to dry.
- If you have more than one toilet in your household advise the infected person to only use one toilet and the rest of the household use the other.

How should hands be washed?

Always use warm, running water and a mild, preferably liquid soap.

- Wet hands and apply a small amount of soap.
- Rub hands together vigorously for 10-15 seconds
- Pay special attention to areas between fingers, finger tips and palms.
- Rinse hands under warm running water.
- Dry thoroughly with a clean, dry towel.

Environmental Health

In the event of a suspected outbreak, an Environmental Health Professional may contact you to gather information as part of the investigation into possible sources.

What about going to work or school or nursery?

All persons with diarrhoea or vomiting should not attend work, school or nursery until they are free from symptoms for 48 hours. Good hand hygiene should be maintained at all times.

For further information see:

NHS inform: <https://www.nhsinform.scot/illnesses-and-conditions/infections-and-poisoning/food-poisoning>

Food Standards Scotland:
<https://www.foodstandards.gov.scot/consumers/food-safety/foodborne-illness/campylobacter>

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