

# Campylobacter



## What Is It?

Campylobacter is a bacterial infection and one of the major causes of diarrhea in children and adults.

## What Are the Symptoms?

The bowel infection caused by campylobacter is similar to those caused by some other germs. Campylobacter infection occurs two to 10 days after the bacteria are swallowed. It can cause diarrhea with fever, stomach cramps and vomiting in adults and children. The diarrhea may be severe and bloody. Mild infections last one to two days and most patients recover in less than one week, but 20 percent have relapse, prolonged or severe illness. Usually symptoms disappear without treatment in less than a week, but there may still be bacteria in the stools for several weeks if treatment is not received.

## Who Gets It and How?

Although outbreaks of campylobacter diarrhea have been reported from child care facilities, these are rare. Child care providers are more likely to encounter this as a separate case. Persons often become infected when they eat or drink foods or liquids contaminated with feces of infected animals, especially poorly cooked poultry products, unpasteurized milk and contaminated water.

Similar exposure to human feces, especially from diapered children, may happen in the child care setting. When puppies and kittens have this germ in their stools, they may also infect people.

## When Should People with This Illness Be Excluded?

Exclude children with diarrhea, especially those in diapers, from child care until one of the following has occurred:

- It has been documented that the child has received a minimum of 48 hours of antibiotic treatment, or
- The diarrhea has subsided and can be contained by the diaper or clothing.

Children in the child care setting who were exposed to campylobacter need not be checked for infection unless they develop symptoms.

Although campylobacter may be present in the feces for a few weeks after diarrhea has stopped, transmission is believed less likely than during episodes of diarrhea.

## Where Should I Report It?

You must report cases of campylobacter to parents and staff. Also notify your state or local health department if you become aware that a child or adult in your facility has developed campylobacter.

Family and household members in contact with a person with campylobacter diarrhea should be made aware of their possible exposure to the bacteria, especially if they are involved in food handling or preparation. If they develop diarrhea, they should immediately see their health care provider and get a stool culture.

## How Can I Limit the Spread?

- Make sure that all meats, especially poultry, are cooked completely before serving. Take care to avoid contaminating foods that will not be cooked with juice from raw meats and poultry.
- Practice good hygiene, especially careful hand washing, after handling pets and cleaning their cages or pens.
- Isolate animals with diarrhea from children and take them to a veterinarian for diagnosis and treatment. However, these bacteria may also be present in the feces of apparently healthy pets.