

Food Safety Fact Sheet

Foodborne Illness: Campylobacteriosis

What is campylobacteriosis?

Campylobacteriosis is a bacterial disease caused by Gram-negative bacilli transmitted through ingestion of organisms via consumption of undercooked poultry or other meat, contaminated food, water or raw milk, or contact with infected animals. It is the most common bacterial cause of diarrheal illness in the United States. Many more cases go undiagnosed or unreported, and campylobacteriosis is estimated to affect more than 2 million people a year.

Most cases of campylobacteriosis are associated with handling raw poultry or eating raw or undercooked poultry meat. It also can be transmitted from contaminated water or unpasteurized milk.

A very small number of Campylobacter organisms (fewer than 500) can cause illness in humans. Even one drop of juice from raw chicken meat can infect a person. The organism is not usually spread from person to person.

What are the symptoms?

Most people who become ill with campylobacteriosis get diarrhea, cramping, abdominal pain and fever within 2 to 5 days after exposure to the organism. The diarrhea may be bloody and can be accompanied by nausea and vomiting. The illness typically lasts 1 week. Some persons who are infected with Campylobacter don't have any symptoms at all. In people with compromised immune systems, Campylobacter occasionally spreads to the bloodstream and causes a serious life-threatening infection.

Most people who get campylobacteriosis recover completely within 2 to 5 days, although sometimes recovery can take up to 10 days, although prolonged illnesses and relapses may occur in adults.

How can I prevent campylobacteriosis?

Here are some simple steps you can follow to help prevent campylobacteriosis:

- Cook all poultry products thoroughly. Make sure that the meat is cooked throughout (no longer pink), any juices run clear and the inside is cooked to 165°F.
- If you are served undercooked poultry in a restaurant, send it back for further cooking.
- Wash hands with soap before and after handling raw foods of animal origin.
- Use separate cutting boards for food of animal origin and other foods.
- Carefully clean all cutting boards, countertops and utensils with soap and hot water after preparing raw food of animal origin.
- Avoid consuming unpasteurized milk and untreated surface water.
- Make sure that persons with diarrhea, especially children, wash their hands carefully and frequently with soap and warm water to reduce the risk of spreading the infection.
- Wash hands with soap and warm water after having contact with pet feces.