

ALLEGAN COUNTY HEALTH DEPARTMENT

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Office Administration

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Bioterrorism Preparedness

(269) 673-5411

Personal Health

(269) 673-5411



Communicable Disease

(269) 673-5411

Environmental Health

(269) 673-5415

Resource Recovery

(269) 673-5415

Campylobacter

What is Campylobacter?

Campylobacter is a bacteria that can cause an intestinal illness in people and animals. It is one of the most common causes of diarrhea illness in the United States. Campylobacter jejuni is the species most frequently involved in illnesses, but other species of Campylobacter may also cause illness.

How is it spread?

Campylobacter is transmitted by fecal-->oral spread. The bacteria is shed in the feces (stools) of people and animals infected with Campylobacter. You can get Campylobacter by eating food or drinking beverages that have been contaminated with feces from infected people or animals. You can also get it if you contaminate your own hands cleaning up animal droppings or handling raw poultry and meat, then eating with your hands or putting your hands in your mouth. The bacteria may be spread within the family unit and between small children.

Campylobacter is present on most uncooked poultry, sometimes in beef, pork, unpasteurized dairy products, and unchlorinated water. The bacteria can be present in a wide variety of animal droppings including mammals (puppies, kittens, cows, and pigs) and birds (chickens, turkeys and wild birds). Adequate cooking destroys the bacteria.

What is the incubation period?

The incubation period can range from 1 to 10 days, but is usually 2 to 5 days.

What are the symptoms?

Typical symptoms are diarrhea, abdominal pain, fever, fatigue, headache, nausea and vomiting. Symptoms usually last 2-10 days, and symptoms sometimes recur. Not all infected persons show signs and symptoms. About 1 in 1,000 persons infected with Campylobacter develops a serious condition called Guillain-Barre Syndrome (GBS). GBS causes limb weakness, sometimes progressing to paralysis. At least 30-40% of cases of GBS are probably caused by Campylobacter infection.

How to prevent Campylobacter

- Always wash your hands thoroughly with soap and water before eating, before handling food, after using the toilet, after changing diapers, and after handling your pets or cleaning up after them.
- Cook all food from animal sources thoroughly, especially poultry. If the meat or poultry is still pink in the center, it is not thoroughly cooked.
- Use only clean utensils, dishes and cutting boards to prepare food that is already cooked or will be eaten raw. Anything you use to prepare raw meat, seafood, or poultry, including your hands and the table or counter top, should be washed thoroughly before you touch any other food.
- Do not eat raw shellfish or unpasteurized dairy products (such as cheese). Do not drink unpasteurized milk or eat anything made with unpasteurized milk.

More information can be found at www.cdc.gov/campylobacter

This fact sheet is not intended to replace the advice of your physician. Parents should contact their healthcare provider if they have concerns regarding their child's health. If you have general questions, you may contact an Allegan County Public Health Nurse at 269-673-5411.