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# CAMPYLOBACTER INFECTION

## FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

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### **What is campylobacteriosis?**

Campylobacteriosis is an infection caused by a bacteria that affects the intestinal tract. You can get it by eating food or drinking water that is contaminated with the campylobacter bacteria. Anyone can get a campylobacter infection and you can get it more than once. *Campylobacter* is one of the most common bacterial causes of diarrheal illness in San Francisco. Practically all cases occur as single cases, not as part of an outbreak.

### **What are the symptoms of campylobacteriosis?**

A campylobacter infection may cause mild or severe diarrhea, often with fever, stomach cramps or traces of blood in the stool. Campylobacteriosis can also cause nausea and vomiting. Some people have no symptoms at all. The illness usually lasts a week. For people who have a weakened immune system, the illness can last longer and be more serious.

### **How is campylobacter spread?**

Campylobacter bacteria are usually spread by eating or drinking contaminated food or water. Eating food that has been contaminated with juices from raw chicken is the most common source of this infection. Raw chicken and meat are frequently contaminated with campylobacter. Many animals, including chickens, pigs, cows, dogs and birds may carry the germ without being sick. This infection is also common in the developing world so travelers to some foreign countries are also at risk.

### **How soon after becoming infected do symptoms appear?**

Symptoms generally appear 2 to 5 days *after* being infected with campylobacter, but can range from 1 to 10 days after eating the contaminated food or water.

### **For how long can a person carry the campylobacter germ?**

Generally infected people will continue to pass the bacteria (germ) in their stool for several days to several weeks. Certain medicines may shorten the time you are infected.

### **Do infected people need to be isolated or excluded from school or work?**

Generally speaking, no. However, since these germs are carried in the stool, the stools of people with active diarrhea should be considered infectious. **Infected people should wash their hands with soap and warm water each time after using the toilet.** Infected food handlers, child care workers and health care workers may return to work when their diarrhea stops, provided that they carefully wash their hands after every toilet visit. People who change diapers of infants should thoroughly wash their hands after each diaper change.

### **What is the treatment for a campylobacter infection?**

Most people infected with campylobacter get well on their own. Drinking plenty of fluids when sick will help prevent dehydration. Antibiotics are sometimes given by your doctor to treat severe illness and may shorten the length of time you are sick if given early in the illness.

## **Some tips to prevent future campylobacter infections**

- ▶ Always treat raw chicken, beef and pork as if they are contaminated with campylobacter.
  - Wrap chicken and meat in a plastic bag to keep juices and blood from getting on other foods.
  - Refrigerate chicken and meats after purchase.
  - Wash cutting boards, counters and utensils used to prepare raw chicken or raw meat immediately after use to prevent contamination of other foods.
  - Separate raw chicken or meat from cooked chicken or meat to avoid cross-contamination.
  - Cook chicken or meat to appropriate internal temperature (until the meat in the middle is no longer pink, 160°F (72°C) for medium red meat, 170°F (77°C) for breast meat or well-done red meat, and 180°F (82°C) for thigh meat).
  - Wash your hands thoroughly with soap and water after touching raw chicken or meat.
- ▶ Avoid eating raw or undercooked eggs.
- ▶ Avoid eating raw or undercooked meats (i.e. poultry, seafood, beef, pork, etc.).
- ▶ Avoid eating raw or unpasteurized milk, cheese or other dairy products.
- ▶ Avoid drinking untreated surface water, such as water from a lake or stream.
- ▶ Wash your hands with soap and water after having contact with pet feces (i.e. after cleaning pet cages or litter boxes or picking up after a pet dog).
- ▶ **Wash your hands before and after preparing meals.**
- ▶ **Make sure your children wash their hands before eating.**

If you have further questions regarding this infection, please contact your physician, medical clinic, or the San Francisco Department of Public Health at (415) 554-2830 between 8:00 am and 5:00 pm Monday through Friday, excluding holidays.