



Campylobacter Food Poisoning



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What is food poisoning?

Campylobacter food poisoning occurs when you eat food contaminated with sufficiently high numbers of bacteria (germs), which overcome the body's defensive system. It is most likely to occur in the summer when warm weather encourages the growth of bacteria in contaminated food.

What is Campylobacter?

Bacteria called *Campylobacter jejuni* and *Campylobacter coli* are the common causes of diarrhoea in the UK.

Campylobacter is mainly a food-borne disease, and only a small number of bacteria need be ingested to produce the symptoms.

How will you be affected?

This type of food poisoning is associated not only with raw meat and poultry but also with raw milk and infected pets.

Around 50% of dogs and cats excrete the *Campylobacter* bacteria in their faeces and as a result the animal's coat becomes contaminated. In this way it is passed on to humans who stroke their pets.

Campylobacter can also be found in many farm animals, such as cows, sheep and chickens.

How to prevent *Campylobacter* food poisoning

- (1) Ensure poultry is cooked to a high temperature, i.e. reaches a centre temperature of 70°C. The *Campylobacter* organism is destroyed by thorough cooking.
- (2) Do not drink unpasteurised milk.
- (3) Do not drink milk from a milk bottle whose top has been pecked by birds.
- (4) Ensure that hands are washed after contact with pets and farm animals.
- (5) Store raw, cooked foods and ready to eat (particularly meat) separately. Always store cooked food above raw food within the refrigerator, ensuring all food is kept covered.

What are the symptoms of Campylobacter food poisoning?

Flu-like symptoms for the first 24 hours, followed by stomach cramps and severe diarrhoea, which usually lasts from 1-10 days.

The symptoms start between 2 and 10 days after eating the food.

What to do if someone has Campylobacter food poisoning

During the diarrhoeal phase, good personal hygiene is the utmost importance. Food handling should be avoided as it is during this time that it is possible to pass the infection on to another person.

You should also inform your doctor, who will in turn inform Environmental Health Services.

An Officer from Environmental Health Services will then visit or telephone you to give advice and to determine the possible sources of the infection.

Who is more prone to food poisoning?

The very young and the elderly are generally more vulnerable than healthy adults. However, anyone whose health is in some way impaired or whose immune system is low will also be prone to food poisoning.

Further questions?

If you are still worried or need further advice, please do not hesitate to contact Environmental Health Services at Epsom Town Hall, telephone 01372 732000.