

# Gloucester City Council

## *Factsheet*

### CAMPYLOBACTER

Campylobacters are the commonest cause of diarrhoea in Britain.

#### **What is campylobacter?**

After the bacteria have been swallowed they multiply in the gut. The incubation period is between 1 and 11 days (usually 2 to 5 days). Symptoms usually take the form of abdominal cramps, profuse diarrhoea and sometimes vomiting and fever. The patients usually recover without treatment in a few days. The illness is a most unpleasant one but it is rarely fatal even in babies or old people. There is an effective antibiotic treatment for complicated or unusually severe cases.

#### **How are campylobacters spread?**

Campylobacters can be found in the intestinal tracts of wild birds and various other animals including pets. Poultry, may carry large numbers of these bacteria without showing any signs of illness and they constitute a major source of human infection in food (usually through raw or under-cooked meat). Infection can also result from drinking untreated water or milk, or from direct contact with infected animals such as puppies with diarrhoea. Although the faeces of people suffering from the disease are infective, person to person spread is uncommon.

#### **Campylobacters in food**

Any raw meat, especially offal, may be contaminated with campylobacters, but poultry constitute the most prolific source. However, the bacteria are delicate and die if exposed to air for any length of time and they are destroyed by cooking. Although they may be present in food, unlike the salmonellas, they do not multiply in food, so they seldom cause explosive outbreaks of food poisoning. On the other hand the number of bacteria that must be swallowed to produce an illness is very small and it only needs a few transferred, say, from an uncooked chicken to a piece of bread to cause infection.

#### **How can we prevent campylobacter?**

**Water:** Wild and domestic animals shed campylobacters into lakes, rivers, streams and reservoirs, and so all water for human consumption must be properly treated.

**Milk:** Milk from dairy animals carrying campylobacters easily becomes contaminated with them. Milk that is not pasteurised or otherwise heat treated may contain campylobacters.

**Food:** If all raw meat and animal products were handled correctly there would be little risk of infection from them. Much can be achieved by good kitchen hygiene. In particular raw poultry and other types of meat should be kept separate from other food and adequately cooked.



## ENVIRONMENTAL HEALTH

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## Summary:

### Common causes:

- handling raw meat and poultry meat
- eating undercooked meat or poultry
- contact with live cattle or poultry
- drinking untreated (raw) milk
- drinking pasteurised milk from bottles with tops pecked by birds
- contact with domestic pets (especially puppies and kittens)
- drinking untreated water from springs or wells

### How can Campylobacter be avoided?

- **ALWAYS** wash hands thoroughly - **BEFORE** handling or eating food
  - **AFTER** handling raw meat or poultry
  - **AFTER** contact with pets or other animals
- Keep **RAW** and **COOKED** foods apart to prevent any spread of **Campylobacter** germs
- **PROTECT MILK BOTTLES** on the doorstep from being pecked by birds, especially Crows, Jackdaws and Magpies - Provide covers for bottles, e.g. small plastic tubs that your milkman can place over the foil tops

### Return to work/school:

Current Department of Health advice is that Patients should remain off work/school until 48 hours after symptoms have ceased.