

Campylobacter

Fact Sheet



Maine Center for Disease
Control and Prevention

An Office of the
Department of Health and Human Services

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What is campylobacter?

Campylobacter, often called campy, are bacteria that can cause diarrheal disease in humans. The bacteria are common in chickens, but don't make the chicken sick.

How is campylobacter spread?

Campylobacter is spread to people when they eat food that has not been well cooked, drink water that has the bacteria in it, or drink unpasteurized milk. Campylobacter is found in the feces of infected people. Sometimes it can spread from person to person if a person has the bacteria on their hands and doesn't wash well after using the toilet or changing diapers. People can also be infected by their pets.

What are the signs and symptoms of campylobacter?

The most common symptom is diarrhea. The diarrhea may have blood in it. Other symptoms include stomach pains, tiredness, fever, nausea and vomiting.

How will I know if I have a campylobacter infection?

Your doctor's office will send a sample of your stool to the laboratory to be tested. It will take several days to do the test. Some people can have the disease and not have any symptoms.

How is campylobacter treated?

Most people get over this infection without any treatment. A few can get very sick and may need antibiotics. People with campylobacter should drink lots of fluids while they have diarrhea.

How can I prevent campylobacter?

- Wash hands with soap and water after using the toilet, changing diapers and before and after handling raw meat.
- Cook all poultry (chicken and turkey) all the way through. The meat should not be pink and the juices should be clear.
- Use only clean utensils, dishes and cutting boards when cooking or preparing food. Wash them and your hands frequently.

- Do not eat raw shellfish or unpasteurized dairy products. Do not drink raw milk.
- Do not drink from untreated water supplies when hiking or camping. Try not to swallow water when swimming or boating.
- If you are taking care of someone with campylobacter wash your hands with soap and water after cleaning the bathroom, helping with toileting, changing diapers or handling soiled clothing or bed linens.

What about work and daycare?

- Children with diarrhea should not attend daycare until the diarrhea stops.
- People with campylobacter should not work in food related businesses as food handlers or cooks until their diarrhea stops.
- People who work in health care should not do patient care until their diarrhea stops.

How common is campylobacter?

Campylobacter is one of the most common bacterial causes of diarrhea in the United States.

Campylobacter in Maine

Campylobacter has been reported from almost every county in Maine. Most of the cases have been in adults. The number of reported cases has not changed a lot over each of the last five years. For specific information on the number of campylobacter infections reported in Maine, please visit the Maine CDC website: <http://www.maine.gov/dhhs/boh/newpubs.htm> and refer to the Infectious Disease Epidemiology Program Documents.

Where can I get more information?

For more information contact your healthcare provider or local health center. You can also contact the Maine Center for Disease Control and Prevention by calling 1-800-821-5821. The federal Centers for Disease Control and Prevention website - <http://www.cdc.gov> - is another excellent source of health information.