

Campylobacter

Campylobacter is a common type of gastroenteritis (tummy upset) in New Zealand. It causes diarrhoea (runny poo) and stomach pains and can last for up to ten days. It's most often caused by eating unsafe raw or undercooked chicken or other types of poultry. While most people can self-manage their recovery at home, young children and older people can get very ill from campylobacter infection.



How does campylobacter spread

You can get campylobacter by:

- handling raw meat or poultry
- eating contaminated raw or under cooked food
- eating contaminated bought food – for example, takeaways and at restaurants
- drinking contaminated water (e.g. roof water supplies)
- drinking raw milk or raw milk products
- having contact with poo (faeces or faecal matter)
- having contact with infected animals
- swimming or playing in contaminated recreational water, such as rivers and lakes.

People who have campylobacter pass the bacteria out of their body in their poo. If you then eat food, drink water or touch things contaminated with the bacteria you can be infected too.



Signs and symptoms

Campylobacter symptoms can include:

- runny poo (diarrhoea)
- stomach pain or cramps
- feeling or being sick

Symptoms usually appear two to five days after infection. They can last for up to ten days.

Some people do not get any symptoms. Others get a flu-like illness first, such as headache, muscle pains, fever and fatigue, before developing tummy issues.

If you have symptoms

While most people can recover from campylobacter at home, you should get health advice if symptoms are severe or ongoing. You can contact your doctor, or call Healthline for free on 0800 611 116.

Your doctor may request a poo sample for testing. Testing is the only way to confirm what illness you have.



Treatment

You can ease your recovery by drinking plenty of fluids to avoid getting dehydrated. Dehydration is when your body does not have enough fluids and salts to function properly.

Most people will recover without the need for any medication, other than simple pain and fever relief. If your symptoms are particularly severe or last for a long time you may be given antibiotics to help clear the infection from your body. Some people, especially young children and older people, can get very ill from campylobacter and may need hospital treatment.

Restrictions

If you have campylobacter you are at risk of passing on the virus to others. You should stay home from work, school or daycare until you have been free of diarrhoea symptoms for at least 48 hours (2 days).

You should also wash your hands with soapy water for 20 seconds, then dry well with a clean cloth or paper towel every time:

- after going to the toilet
- before preparing food, eating or drinking
- after changing babies nappies

If you have symptoms, avoid preparing food for other people. If you must do so, wash and dry your hands well first.



Prevention/Immunisation

You can reduce your risk of getting campylobacter and passing it on by following simple precautions.

Food safety

- Thaw meat in the fridge and not at room temperature.
- Keep raw meat covered and separate from other foods, and store at the bottom of the fridge.
- Use separate chopping boards when preparing raw foods and cooked foods, or wash the board in hot soapy water between preparing raw and cooked foods.
- Cook chicken thoroughly until the juices are clear.
- Cook all minced meat patties and sausages thoroughly.
- Avoid drinking raw milk and raw milk products.
- Avoid eating shellfish which has been gathered from contaminated waters.
- Wash fruit and vegetables before use.

Safe drinking water

- Avoid drinking water that has not been treated – including water from lakes, rivers or streams, or from an area where you don't know the quality of source water.

- If you have to drink untreated water that is taken from a roof, river or lake (e.g., in a rural area), it should be boiled for at least 1 minute or treated

Swimming

- Avoid swimming in a pool if you have diarrhoea. You need to wait at least two weeks after the symptoms have gone.

Bathing and washing

- Avoid sharing bathwater, as this can easily spread the infection.



For more information

- If you are concerned about campylobacter call Healthline for free on 0800 611 116 or contact your doctor or practice nurse.
- For more information visit: healthnz.govt.nz/campylobacter