



Human pathogen information sheet – hygiene keeps you safe!

What are campylobacter?

Campylobacter are bacteria causing infectious illnesses. They occur around the world. In Europe, they mostly occur during the hot season. The bacteria mostly live in the digestive tract of animals without causing them to become sick. Campylobacter are the most common bacterial illnesses with diarrhoea in Germany.

How are campylobacter transmitted?

Via foodstuffs

The main source of infection with campylobacter is the ingestion of foodstuffs contaminated with bacteria. The transmission often happens via poultry. In contrast to salmonella, campylobacter cannot reproduce in foodstuffs. However, they can survive for a time. Lack of kitchen hygiene may cause infection, e.g. via cutting boards or knives that are not cleaned sufficiently after preparing raw meat.

Foodstuffs that are likely to be contaminated with campylobacter:

- ▶ Insufficiently heated poultry and poultry products
- ▶ Raw milk or raw milk products
- ▶ Minced meat that is not cooked thoroughly
- ▶ Fresh raw sausage types such as ground pork
- ▶ Contaminated drinking water, e.g. from a well

Person-to-person

Contact infection from person to person is possible as well. The pathogens are transferred from contaminated hands to the mouth by way of minute traces of faecal matter.

By direct animal contact

Pet owners can be infected by their pets. The infection happens via animal faeces here.

By contaminated water

Sometimes, bathing ponds are contaminated with campylobacter as well. In rare cases, infection is then possible by swallowing water while bathing in these contaminated bodies of water.

What symptoms do the patients show?

Illness usually starts with fever, headache and muscle pain, followed by severe stomach ache and cramps, nausea and diarrhoea. Diarrhoea may be mushy, very watery or even bloody. Usually, campylobacter infections last for up to one week. Usually, they progress without complications and the symptoms disappear again on their own. Many campylobacter infections occur without any symptoms.

Complications if they occur may be rheumatic joint inflammations or meningitis. In very rare cases neurological conditions such as Guillain-Barré syndrome, which can cause paralysis, occur as well.

What's the incubation period – and how long are you contagious?

There are usually 2 to 5 days between infection and breakout of the illness. Rarely, the incubation period may be 1 to 10 days. Patients are contagious while they excrete pathogens in their faeces. On average, this is the case for 2 to 4 weeks - this means that pathogens can be excreted even after the symptoms have disappeared. Immune-compromised persons may be contagious via their excretions for much longer.

Who is most at risk?

Infants in particular are at risk of falling ill. Young adults aged 20-29 are frequently affected as well. Generally, infants, toddlers, older persons and immune-compromised persons are particularly at risk.

What should I do if I fall ill?

- ▶ Stay home during acute illness and do not exert yourself physically.
- ▶ Observe particularly careful hand hygiene while ill. Wash your hands thoroughly with soap and water after going to the toilet.
- ▶ In case of strong diarrhoea and vomiting, compensation for the loss of fluids and salt is particularly important. This means that you have to drink a lot. Eat easy-to-digest food with a sufficient salt supply
- ▶ To balance out the loss of salts, it may be sensible to use the electrolyte replacement solutions from the pharmacy.



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What should I do if I fall ill?

- ▶ Toddlers and older persons react particularly sensitively to loss of fluids. You should seek medical advice especially if diarrhoea persists for more than 2 to 3 days.
- ▶ If required, campylobacter is treated with antibiotics.
- ▶ Patients should not prepare any food for others.
- ▶ If you are handling food in your job and suffer from any contagious vomiting and/or diarrhoea, you must not attend work for the time.
- ▶ Children younger than 6 years who have been diagnosed with infectious vomiting and/or diarrhoea or where this is suspected, must not attend community facilities such as schools or nurseries. Parents must inform the community facility of the child's illness. The facility usually must not be attended again until 2 days after the symptoms disappear. The precise time is determined by the relevant health office. A written medical certificate is not required.

How can I protect myself?

Good kitchen hygiene: Correct handling of foodstuffs

Campylobacter are relatively sensitive. They cannot reproduce any further in foodstuffs. However, the pathogens may survive for several months on deep-frozen products. They remain infectious even after thawing.

- ▶ Cook meat - particularly poultry - completely at all times! Slight roasting is not enough to kill the pathogens.
- ▶ Dispose of the thawing water from frozen poultry and other meat at once. Rinse all objects and worktops that have come into contact with it with hot water and then wash your hands thoroughly.
- ▶ Don't wash raw chicken before cooking. This avoids spreading pathogens around the kitchen in splashes of water.
- ▶ Use separate kitchen utensils for raw and cooked foods. Use warm water and detergent to thoroughly clean worktops and equipment, and dry these after every work step.
- ▶ Change kitchen towels and wiping rags often, and wash these at a minimum temperature of 60 °C.
- ▶ Babies, infants, seniors and people with compromised immune systems should avoid food products such as raw milk or meat that has not been cooked through properly.
- ▶ Replace brushes and sponges used for washing the utensils at regular intervals.
- ▶ Cook raw milk that comes right from the producer before ingesting it. Pasteurised milk is to be preferred.

Good hand hygiene

Always wash your hands thoroughly with soap and water after using the toilet, before preparing food and before eating. When preparing food and after contact with raw foodstuffs and particularly with raw poultry, observe consistent hand hygiene. Carefully dry your hands with a clean cloth after washing.

Where can I find out more?

Your local health authority can provide you with further advice. Since contagious diarrhoea is subject to the rules of the German Prevention of Infection Act, they will also have the latest information and be very experienced in dealing with the disease.

Additional consumer advice can be found online on the pages of the Federal Institute for Risk Evaluation (www.bfr.bund.de), and of the Federal Office for Consumer Protection and Food Safety (www.bvl.bund.de).

More (specialist) information is available online from the Robert Koch Institute (www.rki.de/campylobacter). For more information about how hygiene can guard against infection, please visit the Federal Centre for Health Education website (www.infektionsschutz.de).



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