

INFORMATION FOR PATIENTS
ABOUT
CAMPYLOBACTER

Information/advice for patients, relatives and carers

If you require this information in an alternative language or format (such as large print), please ask your nursing staff to arrange this or contact the Infection Prevention and Control Nurses on the number provided on the back page of this leaflet.

What is Campylobacter?

Campylobacter is a germ which can cause a variety of symptoms.

- Flu like illness
- Headaches
- Feeling sick
- Diarrhoea (may be blood stained)
- Stomach pains
- Vomiting (rarely)

The symptoms, particularly the stomach pains, can be severe but usually settle within a week. In a small number of cases symptoms may take longer to settle. The illness is most unpleasant, but rarely life threatening, and normally settles without antibiotic treatment.

How did I catch it?

Campylobacter is spread by several means:

- By swallowing the germs when eating or drinking contaminated food, milk or water, eg eating undercooked meat or poultry at BBQs.
- Drinking un-pasteurised milk or milk contaminated by birds pecking through foil milk bottle tops on the doorstep or drinking untreated water.
- From pet dogs or cats who have the illness. Especially puppies or kittens with diarrhoea.
- Rarely, from someone else who is ill with the germ. Spread can occur when parents of an infected baby deal with soiled nappies and forget to wash their hands.

The infection develops about 2-5 days after swallowing the germ.

What is the treatment?

Most people recover without special treatment. In severe cases an antibiotic may be given.

What happens in hospital?

Patients who are ill enough to need admission to hospital may be given intravenous fluids to correct dehydration. As soon as you feel able you should eat and drink normally.

In hospital, children and adults will be nursed in a single room until the diarrhoea settles and they have had 72 hours without diarrhoea. It is

important to wash your hands carefully after going to the toilet and before meals, using liquid soap and warm water.

Family and friends can visit as normal; they should wash their hands before leaving your room.

Can laundry be washed at home?

Yes. Any soiled items should be taken home in a tied plastic bag or carrier bag. Garments should be placed in a washing machine and washed on the hottest cycle they can withstand. After handling the soiled laundry, hands should be washed thoroughly.

Can a person with Campylobacter go home?

Yes. Once a patient is well enough, he/she may go home. To prevent spreading the infection, hands should always be washed after using the toilet, before eating and before handling food. In general the risk of spreading the infection to others is surprisingly small.

How will I know I am no longer infected?

Campylobacter disappears from the stools within a few weeks of illness. Once your symptoms settle, the germ will be present in only low numbers and good personal hygiene, including careful hand washing will prevent the spread of Campylobacter. There is no need to send further stool specimens.

Should I expect a visit from the Environmental Health Department?

No, but when you get home you may receive a letter from the Environmental Health Officer, whose role is to try and establish where the infection came from and to answer any queries or give you further advice.

When can I go back to work/school/nursery?

Most people can return to work or school once their stools have returned to normal, as long as they are careful about hand washing. However, the following people must not return to work/school/nursery until any vomiting has ceased and stools have been normal for 48 hours (off treatment).

- Food handlers
- Care workers and nursery staff
- Children aged less than 5 years

- Those who are unable to maintain good hand hygiene, eg due to physical disability, learning difficulties or mental illness.

If you are uncertain whether you or your relatives fall into one of these groups, further advice is available from your local Environmental Health Department (Harrogate Borough Council (01423) 500600).

How can I avoid getting it again?

The main ways to avoid getting Campylobacter are:-

- Thorough cooking of poultry and meat (particularly at BBQs).
- Careful handling of food to prevent cross-contamination from raw meat and poultry to other foods.
- Avoid drinking untreated milk and untreated water (particularly abroad).
- Cover milk bottle tops on doorstep, and discard milk from bird-pecked bottles.
- Careful hand washing after contact with domestic pets and farm animals, and when changing baby nappies.

If you have any further questions, then ask the Doctor or Nurse on the Ward or ask to speak to one of the Infection Prevention and Control Nurses.

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