

## FACTSHEET 2 – Campylobacter

August 2016

### **What Is Campylobacter?**

Campylobacter bacteria cause food poisoning. It is the commonest cause of food poisoning in Britain.

### **What Are The Symptoms?**

Symptoms include diarrhoea, vomiting, stomach pains and cramps, fever and generally feeling unwell.

### **How Long Do The Symptoms Last?**

They usually develop within two to five days but can take as long as ten days. Most cases start to clear up after two to three days of diarrhoea and from eighty to ninety percent settle within one week.

### **Who Gets Campylobacter?**

Anyone can get campylobacter, but travellers to developing countries, young children under 5 years of age, those over 60 and people who work with farm animals or in the meat industry are at greater risk.

### **How Do You Get Infected?**

You usually get infected by eating contaminated food. Campylobacter is found in most raw poultry and is common in raw meat. Mushrooms and shellfish can also be contaminated but this is unusual. Avoid storing raw and cooked foods together and don't use the same work surfaces, or utensils when preparing raw and cooked food. You can also get campylobacter from infected pets and other animals.

It is impossible to tell from its appearance whether food is contaminated with campylobacter. It will look, smell and taste normal so correct handling and cooking are very important.

### **How Can You Avoid Getting Infected?**

- Wash your hands thoroughly with soap and warm water:
  - before preparing and eating food;
  - after handling raw food;
  - after going to the toilet or changing a baby's nappy;
  - after contact with pets and other animals;
  - after working in the garden;
- Keep cooked food away from raw food.
- Store raw foods below cooked or ready to eat foods in the fridge to prevent contamination.

- Cook food thoroughly, especially meat, so that it is piping hot, as this will destroy any campylobacter.
- Keep all kitchen surfaces and equipment including knives, chopping boards and dish cloths clean.
- Do not drink untreated water from lakes, rivers or streams.

You should pay special attention to hygiene during farm visits, washing hands after any contact with animals and eating only in designated areas.

If someone has campylobacter put all dirty clothes, bedding and towels on the hottest cycle of the washing machine possible. Clean toilet seats, toilet bowls, flush handles, taps and wash hand basins after use with detergent and hot water, followed by a household disinfectant.

### **How Do You Treat Campylobacter?**

Most people who have campylobacter recover without treatment within two to five days, although it can sometimes take up to ten days to get better. It is important to drink plenty of fluids as diarrhoea or vomiting can lead to dehydration and you can lose important sugars and minerals from your body. Your doctor may recommend a re-hydration solution, available from your pharmacist.

- If you feel sick, try taking small sips of fluid – frequently;
- Avoid tea, coffee, carbonated drinks or alcohol;
- Always dilute sugary drinks, even if you would not normally dilute them;
- A simple painkiller like paracetamol can help combat any pain;

If the infection is very severe, you may be given antibiotics. If you are given antibiotics it is essential that you complete the course as prescribed.

### **Do You Need To Stay Off Work Or School?**

Yes. While you are ill and have symptoms you are infectious. You can return to work or school once you have been free from diarrhoea for 48 hours.

You should tell your employer you have had campylobacter infection if you work with vulnerable groups such as the elderly, the young, those in poor health, or if you handle food.

If you have concerns about your health, see your family doctor.