

Campylobacter on the Farm

What is *Campylobacter*?

Campylobacter is a type of bacteria that causes the diarrheal illness campylobacteriosis.

Campylobacter is one of the most common causes of diarrheal illness in the United States.

What are the symptoms?

Symptoms of a *Campylobacter* infection can include diarrhea, stomach cramping, stomach pain, and fever. People usually get sick 2 to 5 days after they ingesting the bacteria.

How long does it last?

The symptoms usually last for about 1 week. Treatment for a *Campylobacter* infection may be available from your health care provider. However, most healthy people with mild symptoms will recover without treatment.

How is *Campylobacter* spread?

Campylobacter lives in the intestines of birds (specifically poultry) and other animals. It can be found in water, food, or surfaces that have been contaminated with the feces of infected humans or animals. *Campylobacter* bacteria do not tolerate dry environments or heat but can often survive in moist environments for up to several weeks.

People become infected with *Campylobacter* by swallowing the bacteria. This can happen in several ways:

- Contact with infected pets or farm animals.
- Eating raw or undercooked poultry.
- Drinking raw milk.
- Drinking untreated water from lakes, rivers, streams, ponds, or shallow wells.

What should I do if I have symptoms?

- Contact your health care provider.
- Wash your hands often. Use soap and running water and wash for 20 seconds.
- Do not prepare food for others while you are ill.

Where is *Campylobacter* found on the farm?

The most common source of *Campylobacter* on the farm is live poultry, such as chickens, turkeys, and ducks, and their droppings. The bacteria can also be found in the intestines of many animals, including cattle, pigs, sheep, goats, kittens and puppies.

Campylobacter can cause a diarrheal illness in livestock and poultry, but it is more common for animals to be infected and not show any signs of illness. Puppies and kittens infected with *Campylobacter* are more likely to show signs of illness, including diarrhea, decreased appetite, and vomiting. The bacteria are easily spread among animals through common food and water sources that become contaminated with manure. Even if an animal does not show any signs of illness, it may be passing the bacteria in its feces.

How can *Campylobacter* be prevented in poultry, livestock, and the farm environment?

Because animals with *Campylobacter* infections do not always show signs of illness, it is not practical to identify and remove infected animals. If an animal does have diarrhea, it is important to isolate the animal so it cannot spread any germs it might have to other animals or the environment.

- Good hygiene and sanitation practices can lower the levels of *Campylobacter* found on the farm.
- Design feeders and waterers to keep manure out.
- Work with a veterinarian to diagnose and treat sick animals.

How can I prevent the spread of *Campylobacter* and other germs from animals to humans?

- **Wash your hands** with soap and running water before eating or drinking, especially after working on the farm or handling materials that might be contaminated with manure.
- If no running water and soap is available, hand sanitizer may be used until you are able to wash your hands with soap and water.
- Avoid eating or drinking in barns or other areas where animals are housed.
- Wear dedicated clothing or coveralls and shoes when out in the barn. Remove barn clothing and shoes prior to entering the main part of the house to keep manure out of the house.
- Inform visitors to the farm of the importance of hand washing for preventing infections with *Campylobacter* and other germs.
- People with weakened immune systems (children < 5 years, people > 65 years, pregnant woman, and people with certain medical conditions) should avoid the barn and other animal areas if possible. People with weakened immune systems may stay sick for longer and have a harder time getting rid of the infection than those with a healthy immune system.
- Keep house pets out of the barn to keep them from becoming infected or tracking manure into the house.
- Provide play areas for children that are away from areas of the farm that may be heavily contaminated with manure.
- Do not drink raw milk.
- If the farm has well water, it is a good idea to test the water once a year for total coliform bacteria. These bacteria do not cause any illness but their presence indicates that contamination has found its way into the well and disease organisms may also be present.

How can I prevent the spread of *Campylobacter* in my home?

- Cook all poultry products thoroughly.
- Separate raw poultry from vegetables and cooked foods.
- Prevent cross-contamination in the kitchen by washing hands, cutting boards, countertops, knives, utensils, and other surfaces after handling raw poultry. For example, when grilling chicken, do not place cooked chicken back on the same plate the raw chicken was on.
- Wash your hands with warm, soapy water for at least 20 seconds
 - ✓ After using the bathroom
 - ✓ After changing diapers
 - ✓ After touching animals
 - ✓ Before eating
- Wash your hands more often when you or someone in your house is sick.

For more information, please visit the Minnesota Department of Health website at www.health.state.mn.us or contact Carrie Klumb at 651-201-5414. For more information on the Upper Midwest Agricultural Safety and Health (UMASH) Center, please visit the website at www.umash.umn.edu.