This leaflet is to tell you about **Campylobacter infection**. Although this illness usually doesn't cause any long -term problems, it is an unpleasant condition while it lasts. Now read on….

What is Campylobacteriosis and how common is it?

Campylobacteriosis is an illness that causes diarrhoea that is caused by bacteria (germs) called Campylobacter. It is the commonest bacterial cause of diarrhoea in the United Kingdom and it is likely that many other cases are undiagnosed or are not reported. Virtually all cases occur as isolated events and not as a part of any large outbreaks.

The condition occurs much more frequently in the summer months than in the winter. It is found more often in infants and young adults than in other age groups and in males more often than females.

How is Campylobacteriosis caught?

Most cases of Campylobacteriosis arise from handling raw poultry or eating undercooked poultry meat. It can also be caught from contaminated water and milk, where cases have been linked to bird pecking of bottle tops.

A very small number of germs are needed to cause illness in humans - just one drop of juice from raw chicken meat, for instance.

A common way of becoming infected is to cut raw poultry meat on a cutting board and then use the unwashed or lightly rinsed board to prepare foods such as salad vegetables or cold meats. Because these foods do not need cooking, any contamination from the chicken can survive and be passed on.

The germ is not usually spread from person to person unless the infected person is a small child or is producing a large amount of diarrhoea.

Some people become ill through contact with an ill dog or cat.

How does Campylobacter get into food?

Many chicken flocks have birds that contain Campylobacter within their intestines but which produce no symptoms of any illness. Estimates vary but more than half of the raw chicken on sale within the U.K. is thought to have Campylobacter on it. The germ is also present in giblets, especially on the liver.

Unpasteurised milk can become contaminated if the cow has a Campylobacter infection or if the milk is contaminated with manure. Because so few germs are needed to cause illness, it is very difficult to prevent contamination, even with the best dairy hygiene standards.

Surface waters and mountain streams can become contaminated with infected faeces from cattle or wild birds.

What are the symptoms of Campylobacteriosis?

Most people with this illness develop diarrhoea, abdominal pain and sometimes fever within 2 to 5 days of becoming infected. In some cases it can take up to 11 days for symptoms to start and for others they ma y develop no symptoms at all. The diarrhoea may be bloody and can be accompanied by nausea and vomiting. Abdominal pain may persist for several days after other symptoms subside.

In persons with reduced immunity such as the very infirm or those who are on special medical treatment, the illness can occasionally spread to the bloodstream and cause a very serious illness.

Are there any long term complications of Campylobacteriosis?

Most people who have this illness recover completely within two to five days although sometimes it can take a few days longer. Arthritis and other serious long term effects are possible but these happen very rarely.

How do you know if you have Campylobacteriosis?

Many different kinds of infections can cause diarrhoea and bloody diarrhoea. Campylobacteriosis can only be diagnosed by growing the germ from a stool sample in a laboratory.

How is Campylobacteriosis treated?

Virtually all persons infected with Campylobacter will recover without any specific treatment. They should drink plenty of fluids as long as the diarrhoea lasts.

In more severe cases, antibiotics can be used and can shorten the duration of symptoms if they are given early in the illness.

What can I do to prevent Campylobacteriosis?
What can I do if I have it?

There is no vaccine against Campylobacter nor do you become immune to it, so it is important to prevent it spreading and to avoid infection as far as possible.

Cook all poultry products thoroughly. Make sure that the meat is cooked throughout and that any juices run clear.

If you are served undercooked poultry in a restaurant, do not eat it and complain to the manager and to your local Environmental Health Department.

Wash your hands with soap and hot water before and after handling raw meats.

Avoid cross-contamination of foods – remember how few germs are needed to cause illness

Carefully clean all cutting boards, work surfaces and utensils with detergent and hot water after preparing raw meats. Use separate chopping boards for raw and ready-to-eat foods wherever possible.

Avoid consuming unpasteurised milk or water that may be polluted. The clear hillside stream maybe tempting on a hot summer's day but looks can be deceptive.

If you have the illness and work with children or the elderly, or work in a hospital or a food business, advise your supervisor. Your local Environmental Health Department, who can investigate to try and prevent further cases, may contact you.

Campylobacter germs stay in your system for several days after symptoms stop, so it is important to maintain a very high level of personal hygiene during this time.

More information about Campylobacter

The Campylobacter germ is actually a group of bacteria that cause illness in humans and animals.

99% of human illness is caused by one species, Campylobacter jejuni, which grows best at the body temperature of a bird.

It seems well adapted to birds, who have it without becoming ill.

It is very fragile and easily killed by drying.

Freezing greatly reduces its numbers and it does not grow on food once it is contaminated.

It is not clear why it is so rarely spread from person to person when the numbers required to cause illness is so small.

Campylobacter Infection Food Poisoning Fact Sheet 1

1 **Campylobacter**
2 Rotavirus
3 Salmonella
4 E. coli 0157
5 Clostridium perfringens
6 Shigella
7 Giardia
8 Viral Gastroenteritis

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