

9 Where can I get further information?

For more information on Campylobacter or any other infectious diseases, please consult your health care professional.

You can also contact an Environmental Health Officer at the Council on 6429 8900 or e-mail admin@centralcoast.tas.gov.au

Campylobacter

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1 What is Campylobacter?

Campylobacter infection is the most common cause of food poisoning illness within Australia. During 2003 over 14,900 cases of this illness were reported Australia-wide and it appears the incidence of this illness is increasing, not only here in Australia, but also internationally.

2 Who does it commonly affect?

This illness occurs in all age groups, but children under the age of five and young adults remain the most commonly affected. Most cases appear to be sporadic, however outbreaks of this illness can occur, but unfortunately many go undetected.

3 How do I get Campylobacter?

Infection of this illness occurs most commonly by ingesting the organism. This may be from contaminated foods, particularly raw or undercooked meats, such as chicken. Another common mode of transmission is person-to-person via the faecal-oral route. Infection can also occur through contact with infected animals.

This bacterium occurs naturally in many animals, especially poultry. Domestic animals can also be a source, so it is important to wash your hands after playing with animals and before handling food.

4 What is the incubation period?

Campylobacter has an incubation period of usually two to five days. Because of this, it is important to remember that it is highly unlikely that the last thing you ate is the cause of your illness.

5 What are the common symptoms?

Symptoms of Campylobacter infection include abdominal pain, fever, and diarrhoea. These symptoms can last anywhere between two to five days.

People who are experiencing symptoms of Campylobacter infection are infectious throughout their illness, and they may also excrete the organisms for some weeks after symptoms cease. It is important that people who are ill adequately wash their hands after going to the toilet, and before handling food.

6 What treatment is available?

Treatment of this infection is largely focused on controlling the symptoms. More information on treatment options can be obtained from your Medical Practitioner.

7 How can I prevent infection?

Prevention is the key to reducing the number of Campylobacter infections. The following are some simple steps that can help reduce the occurrence of food born illness:

- ✓ Good personal and food hygiene is imperative;
- ✓ Raw meats should be cooked thoroughly and refrigerated after cooking, especially poultry;
- ✓ Utensils must be regularly washed using hot soapy water;
- ✓ Unpasteurised milk and dairy products should not be consumed;
- ✓ Adequate hand washing before handling food.

Health care workers, child care workers, food handlers and children in schools and child care centres should be excluded from work or school until diarrhoea has ceased.

8 What is the role of the Environmental Health Officer

If you are experiencing gastroenteritis symptoms you are encouraged to seek medical advice. Your medical practitioner may take a faecal sample, which is to be sent away for testing in a laboratory to determine the pathogen that is causing your illness.

The State's Department of Health and Human Services will contact your local council to inform them of the result. An Environmental Health Officer will contact you to conduct a routine confidential interview in an attempt to identify a possible cause of your illness. This interview will also determine if there is a possible link between other cases.