

Campylobacteriosis (Campylobacter infections)

It is an intestinal infectious disease caused by Campylobacter bacteria. It is widespread worldwide. It is the most common zoonosis in EU countries.

The cause

Campylobacteriosis is caused by curved bacilli that resemble the shape of the letter s or, when paired, the enlarged wings of a seagull.

Incubation period

The incubation period, the time from infection to disease onset, is 1 to 10 days, usually 2 to 5 days.

Transmission

Campylobacteriosis is a zoonosis, an infectious disease whose causative agent is transmitted directly or indirectly from animals to humans. Campylobacter is often present in the gastrointestinal tract of animals (poultry, sheep, goats, cows, dogs and cats).

It is found in foods of animal origin, often poultry. If these foods are not cooked well before consumption, they can become contaminated.

Campylobacter can be spread by contact with infected and sick people. The patient or infected person excretes the bacilli in the faeces. From here they can easily get on hands or into the environment, food and other people.

Waterborne transmission is theoretically possible.

Susceptibility to infection

Susceptibility to infection is universal. People who are taking medication to reduce stomach acidity are more susceptible.

Symptoms and signs of the disease

The bacilli cause acute inflammation of the gastrointestinal tract: severe diarrhoea, abdominal pain, vomiting and fever may occur. Dehydration can occur due to intense diarrhoea and vomiting.

Infectiousness

Patients and germ-carriers are infectious as long as they excrete the bacterium in their faeces.

Treatment

Treatment is mainly supportive and includes fluid replacement and rest. No special diet is needed; the patient should eat light foods. If there is a risk of dehydration, medical attention should be sought. Consistent hygiene is important, which means washing hands thoroughly, especially after doing what is necessary, after changing nappies, before preparing food, etc., and regularly cleaning toilets and other surfaces that may become contaminated with contaminated excreta. It is also very important that patients stay at home as long as they have digestive problems.

Prevention of the disease

The infection is prevented by the following measures:

- Good personal hygiene, in particular washing hands after using the toilet, after handling raw foods, before eating, etc.
- Proper storage of foodstuffs. Refrigerate perishable foods at temperatures below 4 °C. Store raw foods so that they do not touch ready-to-eat foods in the refrigerator.
- To prevent so-called cross-contamination of food in the kitchen, special utensils and boards should be used to process raw meat, which may contain *Campylobacter* and/or other microbes.
- Good heat treatment of foods, especially raw meat, is important.