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## Campylobacter

### What is campylobacter?

Campylobacter is a bacteria that causes an infection in the small intestine. It is one of the most common causes of diarrheal illness in the United States.

### What are the symptoms of campylobacter?

Symptoms include diarrhea, cramping, abdominal pain, body weakness, fever, nausea, vomiting, and some instances of bloody diarrhea. Some infected persons do not exhibit any symptoms.

### How soon do symptoms appear after infection occurs and how long is it contagious?

The incubation period is normally two to five days, but symptoms may take one to ten days to appear. Persons with campylobacter are contagious throughout the course of the infection, usually from several days to several weeks. Individuals who are not treated with antibiotics may excrete the organism for as long as two to seven weeks. Your doctor will decide whether antibiotics are necessary.

It is safe for children and staff to return to school or work 24 hours after the symptoms are gone without the aid of medications.

### How is campylobacter spread?

Most cases are associated with eating raw or undercooked poultry or from cross-contamination of other foods by these items. Infants may get the infection by contact with poultry packages in shopping carts. Other sources include raw meats, unpasteurized milk, untreated water, puppies and kittens, farm animals or contact by an infected person.

### How can you prevent campylobacter?

Persons with diarrhea should wash their hands carefully and frequently with soap and water to reduce the risk of spreading the infection. In addition, there are a number of precautions you can take to avoid contracting the infection.

- After changing diapers, wash hands carefully with soap and water and dispose of the diaper properly.
- Avoid consumption of unpasteurized milk and untreated surface water
- Always wash your hands with soap and water after having contact with pet feces.
- Be sure poultry products are cooked thoroughly before serving.
- Wash hands with soap after handling raw foods of animal origin and before touching anything else.
- Use separate cutting boards for foods of animal origin and other foods being prepared. All cooking utensils and countertops should be cleaned with soap and hot water after the food is prepared.

### How can I get more information?

For more information on campylobacter or other health issues, call the Sedgwick County Health Department Epidemiology Office at 660-5551.  
Or visit the Sedgwick County website at [www.sedgwickcounty.org](http://www.sedgwickcounty.org).