



## **Campylobacter: Facts for Workers in Ontario**

### **What is campylobacter?**

Campylobacter is often called “campy.” It is a family of bacteria that infects the intestines. The disease is called campylobacteriosis. The symptoms of the disease are:

- mild to severe diarrhea, or bloody diarrhea
- nausea and vomiting
- stomach pain
- fever
- headache
- general malaise or feeling unwell.

Campylobacter is a common cause of diarrhea. Around the world, up to 14% of people with diarrhea have campylobacter.

The stomach pain and cramps can be so bad people think they have appendicitis. In very severe cases, some people get arthritis, meningitis, septicemia and convulsions. However, other people do not get sick from campylobacter infection.

The first time you are infected with campylobacter, you will feel the sickest. If you are infected again, you will not feel as bad, but you can still infect others. For this reason, you must treat your illness promptly to avoid passing the bacteria to a co-worker or family member. Campylobacteriosis is easy to cure.

Campylobacter from work can be prevented. For prevention information, see the end-section called ‘More information’.

### **Who gets campylobacter?**

We do not know how many workers in Ontario get sick from a campylobacter infection. Sometimes it is not noticed. It is often treated as something else or not treated at all.

Workers at the highest risk of getting sick from campylobacter are:

- food processors, restaurant workers and caterers, who touch and prepare raw food
- farm workers
- daycare workers
- laboratory staff who work with animals
- veterinarians, veterinary technicians and veterinary assistants
- hospital workers who perform endoscopic examinations on infected patients or who clean the used instruments
- anyone who comes into contact with an infected person, and does not use good hygiene practices

### **How do you get campylobacter?**

Most people get campylobacter from direct contact with infected body waste. You can get ill from the waste of humans, farm and laboratory animals, wild birds or pets. That includes cattle, sheep, goats, pigs, poultry, monkeys, dogs, cats, hamsters and other rodents.

You can catch campylobacteriosis if:

- you swallow (ingest) any part of a carcass, raw meat or poultry that has been contaminated by animal waste
- you do not wash your hands before you eat, drink or smoke after touching:
  - raw meat or poultry that has been contaminated by infected waste material
  - raw juices from dirty meat or poultry

- other food that has been contaminated from touching cutting boards or utensils that were not washed well after use with infected meat or poultry
- body wastes from infected animals

Some types of campylobacter can be passed on from person to person.

The incubation period for campylobacter is one to seven days. Incubation is the time from your first contact with the bacteria to the time you start showing signs of being sick. Most people get better in two to five days, even without being treated. Some people can take up to ten days to get better. The bacteria are gone after two to three weeks if your illness is treated.

If you do not treat your infection, the bacteria can stay in your body waste for up to three months. You can get sick again, and you can also infect other people.

***What to do if you have campylobacter***

If you think you have a campylobacter infection, go to see your family doctor. Your doctor will find out if you have campylobacter by testing a stool sample.

If you have a work-related campylobacter infection, talk with your employer and file a claim with the Workplace Safety and Insurance Board (WSIB). The WSIB will write to your doctor for a copy of your medical report to see if you're entitled to compensation.

A WSIB adjudicator will make a decision about your claim by talking to you, your employer and your doctor. Your doctor can give you antibiotics if you are sick or infected for a long time. Most people infected with campylobacter get better without any medicine.

You must drink plenty of water (fluids) to avoid the loss of body fluids (dehydration) when you have diarrhea. Wash your hands well before touching food to avoid infecting anyone.

***Can you still work?***

You must stay away from work if you have campylobacteriosis and you handle food. Workers at food-related jobs can infect co-workers and the public. Discuss this with your physician.

Food-related workplaces are:

- dairy and food-processing plants
- restaurants
- hospital kitchens
- supermarkets

Workers who do not work in food-related jobs can still work. To avoid passing on your illness, wash your hands well after going to the toilet. You can return to work when your diarrhea stops. A lab test on your stool sample will show when there are no campylobacter present.

People who feed or give mouth care or medicine to clients must also avoid passing on the infection. These can be workers in:

- schools
- residential programs
- daycare centres
- health services

For more information about campylobacter and your workplace:

- Look at the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention website  
[www.cdc.gov/ncidod/dbmd/diseaseinfo/campylobacter\\_g.htm](http://www.cdc.gov/ncidod/dbmd/diseaseinfo/campylobacter_g.htm)
- Look at the Office of Lab Security (Health Canada) website for an MSDS for campylobacter at  
[www.hc-sc.gc.ca/pphb-dgsp/psp/msds-ftss/msds29e.html](http://www.hc-sc.gc.ca/pphb-dgsp/psp/msds-ftss/msds29e.html)

### **Workplace Safety and Insurance Board**

Ontario's Workplace Safety and Insurance Board (WSIB) plays a key role in the province's occupational health and safety system. Funded by employers, the WSIB is one of the top 10 disability insurers in North America. In addition to a strong prevention mandate, the WSIB provides insurance for injuries and illnesses incurred in workplaces covered under the *Workplace Safety and Insurance Act* and supports early and safe return to work for injured workers.

**This information is available in several languages by calling our information hotline at 416-344-4999 .... toll-free 1-800-465-5606 or Telephone Service for the Deaf (TTY): 1-800-387-0050**