

## Food Safety Hazard: Campylobacter



### Characteristics/description

Campylobacter organisms are spiral-shaped bacteria that can cause disease in humans and animals. Most human illness related to Campylobacter is caused by one species, *Campylobacter jejuni*, but human gastrointestinal illness can also be caused by other species. Campylobacter organisms seem to be well adapted to birds, who are able to carry it without becoming ill. These bacteria are fragile, dying when dried and thriving only at low oxygen levels. Freezing reduces the number of Campylobacter bacteria on raw meat.

### Source

Most cases of Campylobacter infection are associated with eating raw or undercooked poultry meat or from cross-contamination of other foods by these items. Outbreaks of Campylobacter have most often been associated with unpasteurized dairy products, contaminated water, poultry and produce.

### Effects on humans

Symptoms include diarrhea, cramping, abdominal pain and fever. The diarrhea may be bloody and can be accompanied by nausea and vomiting. The illness typically lasts about one week. Single cases of infection usually occur, but campylobacteriosis outbreaks — when two or more people become ill from the same source — have been reported.

### Incubation

Symptoms usually arise within 2-5 days of exposure to the Campylobacter organism.

### Treatment for patients

Almost all persons infected with Campylobacter recover without any specific treatment. Patients should drink extra fluids as long as the diarrhea lasts. Antimicrobial therapy is warranted only for patients with severe disease or those at high risk for severe disease (e.g., immunosuppressed individuals).

### Key links

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention Campylobacter site:  
<https://www.cdc.gov/foodsafety/diseases/campylobacter/index.html>

Food and Agriculture Organization: "Salmonella and Campylobacter in Chicken Meat," <http://www.fao.org/3/a-i1133e.pdf>

World Health Organization Risk Assessment of Broiler Meat:  
[http://www.who.int/foodsafety/publications/micro/MRA12\\_En.pdf](http://www.who.int/foodsafety/publications/micro/MRA12_En.pdf)

### Risk reduction strategies

- Safe food handling practices are recommended to include thorough cleaning and drying of equipment and clothing, effective disposal of waste, limiting cross-contamination of other food products or farm species, etc.
- All poultry products should be cooked thoroughly to kill Campylobacter bacteria, at a minimum internal temperature of 165°F.