

Campylobacter infection

Information for patients from the Infection Prevention and Control Team

You have been given this leaflet as you have been found to have Campylobacter bacteria in your stool.

What is Campylobacter?

Campylobacter is a bacterium which is at present the most common cause of food poisoning in the UK. It is more common in summer, and children and young adults have a higher incidence of infection.

Where does it come from?

Campylobacter is most often found in wild and domestic cattle, poultry, sheep, and goats; however, puppies, kittens, and birds are also a source of infection.

How did I get it?

You can catch the infection in a number of ways.

- By eating contaminated food such as chicken that has not been cooked properly.
- By drinking water or untreated milk that has the bacteria in it.
- By having contact with farm animals or pets such as puppies with diarrhoea.
- By eating other foods that have been contaminated by raw meat during storage.



What are the signs and symptoms?

Most people infected with *Campylobacter* have stomach ache, diarrhoea, and a fever. Vomiting is uncommon.

It can take between one and 11 days after swallowing the bacteria before the illness develops, but it most commonly develops in two to five days.

How is the infection treated?

In most cases there is no special treatment, except to drink plenty of water and rest. In severe cases patients may be given antibiotics. However, diarrhoea often continues for two to three weeks even though patients have had antibiotics.

Why am I being cared for in a single room?

Single rooms help prevent the spread of *Campylobacter* to other vulnerable patients on the ward. The risk of spreading the infection is also greatly reduced by thorough washing and drying of hands by staff and visitors.

Can I have visitors?

All visitors should see the nurse-in-charge before visiting for advice.

The spread of *Campylobacter* from one person to another is uncommon; however, we do advise all visitors wash their hands with soap and water and dry them thoroughly when leaving the isolation room/ward.

How can infection be prevented?

- Keep cooked and uncooked food separate in your kitchen.
- Cook all food properly, especially chicken.
- Do not drink untreated milk (milk straight from the cow).
- Keep milk bottles covered to stop birds pecking the tops and passing the bacteria to the milk.
- Do not drink untreated water from rivers and lakes.
- Be especially careful about drinking water and eating food when abroad.
- Wash your hands with soap and water and dry them thoroughly after:
 - touching pets or farm animals
 - before and after handling raw meat and poultry; and
 - after using the toilet.

An Environmental Health Officer may contact/visit you or your family as part of the investigation to find out how you got the infection.

What will happen at home?

You may be discharged home whilst you still have diarrhoea, if your doctors feel you are well enough. Please do not worry; the precautions taken in hospital are aimed at preventing the spread of infection to other ill and vulnerable patients.

The most important thing you and your family can do is make sure you continue with good personal hygiene, such as hand washing, especially after using the toilet or before preparing food.

Campylobacter has to be reported to **Public Health England**, who are responsible for the health of the general public. Someone from Public Health England may ring you to speak to you, to ask you some questions. Please do not be concerned, this is routine.

Further Information

If you have any questions or concerns, please speak to either the nurse-in-charge of the ward or the matron. If they are unable to help you or you need further information, please contact a member of the Infection Prevention and Control Team on:

- **Queen Elizabeth the Queen Mother (QEQM) Hospital**, Margate
Telephone: 01843 22 55 44 extension 725-3625
- **Kent and Canterbury Hospital**, Canterbury
Telephone: 01227 86 40 49
- **William Harvey Hospital**, Ashford
Telephone: 01233 63 33 31 extension 723-8202 or 723-8198

This leaflet has been produced with and for patients

If you would like this information in **another language, audio, Braille, Easy Read, or large print** please ask a member of staff. You can ask someone to contact us on your behalf.

Any complaints, comments, concerns, or compliments please speak to your doctor or nurse, or contact the Patient Advice and Liaison Service (PALS) on 01227 78 31 45, or email ekh-tr.pals@nhs.net

Patients should not bring in large sums of money or valuables into hospital. Please note that East Kent Hospitals accepts no responsibility for the loss or damage to personal property, unless the property had been handed in to Trust staff for safe-keeping.

Further patient leaflets are available via the East Kent Hospitals web site www.ekhuft.nhs.uk/patientinformation