

What is yersiniosis?

Yersiniosis is an illness caused by a bacteria called *Yersinia enterocolitica* that can infect the digestive tract. Children are infected more often than adults.

What illness results from infection?

The incubation period (the time from first swallowing the bacteria to becoming ill) is normally 4-7 days. Symptoms vary according to the age of the person. Children usually have fever, abdominal pain, and diarrhoea, which is often bloody. In adults there is fever and right-sided abdominal pain, which can be confused with appendicitis. About 1 in 3 people will also suffer from vomiting.

Very occasionally, infection may be followed by a temporary arthritis which is caused by an immune reaction.

Where do Yersinia come from?

The major source of infection is pigs, but the bacteria is also found in the digestive tract of cattle, sheep, goats, horses, dogs and cats. Animals themselves are not usually ill. The most common source of infection is contaminated meat, particularly pork.

How does it spread?

- Usually from contact with contaminated meat, for example, by handling raw meat, and then eating without washing hands.
- Via undercooked pork products, such as sausages and hot dogs
- Drinking unpasteurised contaminated milk or milk products
- Occasionally from another person who has not washed their hands after using the toilet.
- Direct contact with animals
- Water in burns that may be contaminated by grazing animals

How can infection be prevented?

- Cook food thoroughly and pay particular attention to defrosting before cooking frozen foods.
- Use separate chopping boards for cooked and uncooked meats, and raw vegetables.
- Cover and store raw meat separately from other produce in the fridge, preferably on the bottom shelf to prevent juices dripping on cooked or ready to eat foods.
- Avoid eating or drinking raw or undercooked food such as unpasteurised milk, or cheese made from unpasteurised milk.
- Wash hands thoroughly after contact with all animals and their faeces, after using the toilet or

changing nappies, and before preparing food.

How should hands be washed?

Always use warm, running water and a mild, preferably liquid, soap. (It is not necessary to use soaps labelled as antiseptic or antibacterial.)

- Wet hands and apply a small amount of soap
- Rub hands together vigorously for 10-15 seconds
- Pay special attention to areas between fingers, finger tips, and palms.
- Rinse hands under warm running water
- Dry thoroughly on a clean dry towel.

Should I see my GP?

You should consult your GP if one or more of the following applies to you:

- there is blood in your diarrhoea
- you have severe abdominal pain
- the diarrhoea has lasted for 48 hours

How are infections treated?

Most people recover without any specific treatment. Extra fluids are important, especially for babies, children, pregnant women and the elderly.

Symptoms may last for 1-3 weeks.

All persons with diarrhoea should remain off work or school until they have had no symptoms for 48 hours.

If someone in your household has yersiniosis:

- The infected person should not prepare food.
- Soiled bedding and clothes should be washed on the hot cycle of your washing machine.
- Clean surfaces (toilet seats, flush handles, door handles and taps) at least daily with bleach diluted as per manufacturer's instructions.
- If cleaning up diarrhoea or vomit, wear rubber gloves; wash the surface with hot soapy water, rinse, and allow to dry. Use paper towels or disposable cloths. Dispose of cloths immediately into a plastic bag (e.g. carrier), and then in wheelie bin.
- The infected person should not share towels/flannels with anyone.

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