



## Yersiniosis

### What is Yersiniosis?

Yersiniosis is a stomach infection caused by bacteria called Yersinia.

### Who can get yersiniosis?

Anyone can get yersiniosis. However, you are at higher risk of infection and severe illness if you have the following health concerns or treatments:

- a weakened immune system – for example, from HIV infection or AIDS
- cancer treatments such as chemotherapy or radiation
- an organ or bone marrow transplant
- hemochromatosis or iron overload syndrome

Young children and elderly persons are also at higher risk of severe illness.

### What are the symptoms?

Symptoms usually appear 3 to 7 days after you are infected. They include stomach pain, fever, nausea, vomiting and diarrhea. In some cases, yersiniosis can be misdiagnosed as appendicitis. If you have severe cramps and/or severe diarrhea, see your doctor or health care provider.

### How is yersiniosis spread?

Yersinia bacteria can be carried in the stomach or intestinal tract of people and animals, including wild animals and pets. Both people and animals may carry the bacteria and still look and feel healthy. Lakes and streams can also contain these bacteria.

You can get yersiniosis by eating food or drinking water contaminated with yersinia bacteria. Outbreaks of yersiniosis have been linked to untreated water, contaminated tofu and pork and unpasteurized milk.

Yersinia bacteria can also be spread to other foods when cutting boards or utensils are used to cut raw meat, especially pork. If these are not properly cleaned and sanitized after use, the bacteria can spread to other foods using the same cutting board or utensils. This is especially risky for foods that are not normally cooked, such as salads, sandwiches and other ready-to-eat items.

Household pets and other domestic animals can also carry and spread the yersinia bacteria. Birds, reptiles, amphibians (frogs, turtles), rodents and pigs are common carriers of yersinia. It is easy for people, especially young children, to get infected by putting their hands or fingers in, or near, their mouth after they have handled a pet or animal infected with yersinia bacteria.

### How can you prevent yersiniosis?

- Always wash your hands after using the toilet.
- Wash your hands before, during and after preparing food (especially when going from raw to ready-to-eat foods).
- Wash your hands after touching animals.
- Thoroughly cook all foods made from animal sources, especially pork dishes.

- Avoid contamination of cooked or ready-to-eat foods by placing them only on clean, sanitized surfaces which have **not** been used to prepare other foods, especially raw meat.
- Use only pasteurized milk and milk products.
- Educate food handlers and people preparing food about food safety.
- Maintain a clean kitchen.
- Protect foods from rodents.

Remember, you can get yersiniosis from domestic animals and pets. Birds, reptiles, amphibians and rodents are particularly risky as pets, especially for young children.

### What is the treatment for yersiniosis?

If you have yersiniosis, your doctor *may* give you an antibiotic, but sometimes this illness is left to just run their course. Remember, the bacteria are still in your body and you can still spread this illness to others while you are taking the antibiotic. Do not handle food or prepare food for others until your doctor has told you the infection has been treated completely. Always wash your hands before preparing food or eating and after using the bathroom.

### What happens during an outbreak?

If there is a yersiniosis outbreak in your community, local public health officials will investigate to find out the cause. If you have been infected, your local public health officers may ask you some questions. Be prepared to give them a fecal (stool) sample. This will help find the source of the infection and stop it from spreading to others.

Infected persons should **not** handle food until they complete the treatment and they no longer have yersinia bacteria in their body.

### For More Information:

- Visit the BC Center for Disease Control [www.bccdc.ca/dis-cond/a-z/\\_y/YersiniaInfection/Yersinia.htm](http://www.bccdc.ca/dis-cond/a-z/_y/YersiniaInfection/Yersinia.htm) for further information on Yersinia infection.
- For information on preventing Yersiniosis and other similar illnesses, please see the information on petting zoos at [www.bccdc.ca/NR/rdonlyres/7E1717A2-1295-41D8-BA5F-26C402198DDE/0/Epid\\_GF\\_PettingZoos\\_Oct\\_202006.pdf](http://www.bccdc.ca/NR/rdonlyres/7E1717A2-1295-41D8-BA5F-26C402198DDE/0/Epid_GF_PettingZoos_Oct_202006.pdf)



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