

# Yersiniosis

## What is yersiniosis?

Yersiniosis is an intestinal infection caused by bacteria called *Yersinia*.

## How is yersiniosis spread?

*Yersinia* bacteria can be carried in the stomach or intestinal tract of people and animals, including domestic and wild animals. Both people and animals may carry the bacteria and still look and feel healthy. Lakes and streams can also be contaminated by 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 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 when using the same cutting board or utensils.

Household pets and other domestic animals such as animals at petting zoos can carry and spread *Yersinia* bacteria. 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 an infected pet or animal.

## What are the symptoms?

Symptoms usually appear 3 to 7 days after you are infected. They include abdominal pain, fever and diarrhea. Bloody diarrhea can occur in children.

In some cases abdominal pain is severe and yersiniosis can be misdiagnosed as appendicitis. If you have severe cramps or severe diarrhea, see your health care provider.

## How can I prevent yersiniosis?

- Always wash your hands properly after you use the washroom, and before you eat or prepare and handle food, particularly ready-to-eat food
- Wash children's hands after they use the washroom and before they eat
- Wash your hands and your children's hands after touching animals or toys that animals use whether at home or at a petting zoo
- Always store raw meat on the lowest shelf of the refrigerator in a covered bowl to prevent drips of raw meat juice contaminating other foods
- Always wash and sanitize cutting boards, surfaces and utensils immediately after you prepare foods and always before ready-to-eat foods are placed on them
- Thoroughly cook all foods made from animal sources, especially pork. Use a thermometer to check the food has reached an internal temperature of 74°C (165.2°F)
- Use only pasteurized milk and milk products
- Educate people who handle and prepare food about food safety
- Maintain a clean kitchen
- Protect foods from rodents

## What is the treatment for yersiniosis?

If you have yersiniosis, your health care provider may give you an antibiotic, but sometimes this illness is left to run its course. Remember, the bacteria are still in your body and you can spread this illness to others while you are taking the antibiotic. Do not handle food or prepare food for others until 48 hours after your symptoms have stopped.

Drink lots of liquids (which may include drinks with electrolytes) to replace body fluids. Dehydration occurs when you lose too much fluid through diarrhea and is one of the main reasons for hospitalization.

## 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. They may also ask you to provide a fecal (stool)

sample. This will help find the source of the infection and stop it from spreading to others.

## For more information

For more information see the following HealthLinkBC Files:

- [HealthLinkBC File #03 Pasteurized and raw milk](#)
- [HealthLinkBC File #59a Food safety: Easy ways to make food safer](#)
- [HealthLinkBC File #61a Role of pets in human disease](#)
- [HealthLinkBC File #61b Petting zoo and open farm visits](#)
- [HealthLinkBC File #85 Hand washing: Help stop the spread of germs](#)



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