

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 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 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 by using the same cutting board or utensils. There is a higher risk 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. 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.

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 are undergoing certain 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; or
- 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 abdominal pain, fever, nausea, vomiting and diarrhea. Bloody diarrhea often occurs in children. In some cases, yersiniosis can be misdiagnosed as appendicitis. If you have severe cramps and/or severe diarrhea, see your health care provider.

How can I prevent yersiniosis?

- Always wash 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.
- Always wash and sanitize cutting boards, surfaces and utensils immediately before

you prepare foods and before ready-to-eat foods are placed on them.

- Thoroughly cook all foods made from animal sources, especially pork.
- 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.

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 just 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 your health care provider has told you the infection has been treated completely.

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.

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

For More Information

For more information see the following HealthLinkBC Files:

- [HealthLinkBC File #03 Pasteurized and Raw Milk](#)
- [HealthLinkBC File #59a Food Safety: Easy Steps to Make Food Safe](#)
- [HealthLinkBC File #61b Petting Zoos and Open Farm Visits](#)

For more HealthLinkBC File topics, visit www.HealthLinkBC.ca/healthfiles or your local public health unit.

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For deaf and hearing-impaired assistance, call 7-1-1 in B.C.

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BC Centre for Disease Control
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