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What is yersiniosis?

Yersiniosis is a disease caused by bacteria called *Yersinia*. Three different species of *Yersinia* can cause illness in humans. *Y. pestis* causes plague and is described in the plague fact sheet. *Y. enterocolitica* and *Y. pseudotuberculosis* both cause gastrointestinal illness, as described below.

Who gets yersiniosis?

Anyone can get yersiniosis, but young children are at a higher risk for the disease.

How are *Yersinia* bacteria spread?

- By eating contaminated food, especially raw or undercooked pork products. Surfaces can become contaminated with *Yersinia* when preparing raw pork intestines (chitterlings or chitlins). If another food item or hands touch those surfaces and enter someone's mouth, the person can become infected with the bacteria.
- Infants can be infected if their caretakers handle contaminated food and then do not wash their hands or food preparation surfaces properly before handling the infant or the infant's toys, bottles, or pacifiers.
- By drinking contaminated unpasteurized milk or untreated water.
- By contact with infected animals. *Yersinia* often live in animals, particularly pigs, and therefore, can be found in pig products. In addition to pigs, other animals carry *Yersinia*, including rodents, rabbits, sheep, cattle, horses, dogs, and cats. Usually an animal carrying the *Yersinia* bacteria is not sick but it can still cause human illness.
- As a result of the bacteria passing from the feces (stool) or soiled fingers of one person to the mouth of another person due to inadequate hand washing habits.

What are the symptoms of yersiniosis?

Infection with *Y. enterocolitica* can cause a variety of symptoms depending on the age of the person infected. Common symptoms in children are fever, abdominal pain, and diarrhea, which is often bloody. In older children and adults, right-sided abdominal pain and fever might be the predominant symptoms, so that the illness appears similar to appendicitis. A skin rash and joint pains might also develop. Spread of the bacteria through the bloodstream to other parts of the body can occur, but it is very rare.

How soon after exposure do symptoms appear?

Symptoms typically develop 3-7 days after exposure, and can last 1-3 weeks or longer.

How is yersiniosis diagnosed?

Yersiniosis is generally diagnosed by laboratory tests that detect the bacteria in the stool. In people seriously ill with yersiniosis, *Yersinia* may be found in blood and other body sites.

What is the treatment for yersiniosis?

Most people with yersiniosis recover on their own. Persons with diarrhea should drink plenty of fluids to prevent dehydration. Antibiotics are generally not recommended unless the illness is severe.

How can yersiniosis be prevented?

- Wash hands with soap and water before preparing and eating food, and after handling animals and raw meat.
- Prevent cross-contamination in the kitchen. Use separate cutting boards for meat and other foods. Carefully clean all cutting boards, counter-tops, and utensils with soap and hot water after preparing raw meat.
- Be sure pork and pork products are cooked completely before eating, and milk and milk products are pasteurized.
- Use special care when preparing chitterlings or chitlins.
 - Using pre-cooked chitterlings is preferred; raw ones should be pre-boiled for five minutes before cleaning and cooking. Raw chitterlings should be frozen if they are not cooked within two days.
 - Follow instructions for cleaning and preparing the chitterlings.
 - Keep infants and children away from the kitchen while chitterlings are being prepared.
 - When finished, clean all kitchen surfaces, cutting boards and utensils thoroughly. Wash hands and fingernails carefully with soap and water before touching anything else in the kitchen and before handling infants or their toys, bottles, or pacifiers.
- Dispose of animal feces in a sanitary manner.
- Anyone with diarrhea should not work in food handling or patient care, or work or attend child care.

How can I get more information about yersiniosis?

- If you have concerns about yersiniosis, contact your healthcare provider.
- Call your local health department. A directory of local health departments is located at the [VDH Local Health Districts page](#).
- Visit the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention website at [the CDC page on Yersinia](#).

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