



Yersiniosis

What is yersiniosis?

Yersiniosis (yer-sin-ee-o-sis) is a disease caused by bacteria *Yersinia*. *Yersinia* are hardy bacteria that can survive during refrigeration and environments low in oxygen. *Yersinia* bacteria live in the intestines of infected people and animals and are released with bowel movements. *Yersinia* bacteria that are harmful to humans are found in swine, rodents, rabbits, sheep, cattle, horses, dogs and cats.

How is it spread?

Yersiniosis is usually associated with consumption of food or water contaminated with *Yersinia* bacteria, or by contact with a person or animal infected with *Yersinia* bacteria.

Raw meat of infected animals can become contaminated during slaughtering. If good hand hygiene is not practiced after using the toilet or handling raw meat, a person with *Yersinia* bacteria can transfer the bacteria to food and objects. An infant or child can be infected if a parent or caretaker handles contaminated food and does not wash his/her hands adequately before handling the infant or child and their food, bottles, pacifiers or toys.

You can also become infected by:

- eating contaminated food, especially raw or undercooked pork products, or drinking contaminated water.
- consuming contaminated unpasteurized milk or unpasteurized milk products, or
- putting something in your mouth that has been in contact with the droppings of infected animals or stool of infected humans
- children can become infected if they put their hand in their mouth after or while playing with infected puppies and kittens.

What are the symptoms?

Persons infected with *Yersinia* can have a variety of symptoms depending on the age of the person infected. Common symptoms in children are fever, abdominal pain, and diarrhea which may be bloody. In older children and adults, the most common symptoms are right-sided abdominal pain, and fever.

Complications such as skin rash, joint pains or spread of the bacteria to the blood stream can occur in a small number of cases.

Symptoms of yersiniosis generally begin three to seven days (usually under 10 days) after a person becomes infected, lasting approximately 1 – 3 weeks. Occasionally, symptoms may last for a longer period.

What is the treatment for yersiniosis?

Most people who have healthy immune systems will recover without treatment. More severe or complicated cases may require antibiotics.

How do I protect myself and others?

- Thoroughly cook all foodstuffs derived from animal sources, particularly pork and pork products.
- Clean and sanitize counter tops and utensils after contact with raw meats and poultry, especially before using these areas or utensils to prepare ready-to-eat foods or foods that will not be cooked any further.
- Wash hands prior to food handling and eating, after handling raw pork and after animal contact.
- After handling raw chitterlings (pork intestines), clean hands and fingernails well with soap and water before touching infants, their toys, bottles, or pacifiers. Someone other than the food-handler should care for children while chitterlings are prepared.
- Drink only pasteurized milk and water from an approved or chemically treated source.
- Dispose of human, dog and cat feces in a sanitary manner.
- During the slaughtering of pigs, head and neck should be removed from the body to avoid contaminating meat from the heavily colonized pharynx (throat).

Are there any special concerns about yersiniosis?

If you are infected with yersiniosis, and you provide services to others, particularly seniors or children, or are involved in food handling, you should not go to work until you have been symptom free for 24 hours or 48 hours after you have completed treatment.