

Yersiniosis

Public Health – Factsheet

What is yersiniosis?

Yersiniosis is an intestinal* illness caused by the bacteria, or germ, Yersinia.

What are the symptoms of yersiniosis?

Common symptoms, especially in young children, include fever, diarrhea (may be bloody) and stomach pain. In older children and adults, stomach pain may feel like appendicitis. Although rare, sometimes the infection gets into the blood, causing serious illness that is often fatal. Complications like arthritis and a skin rash can happen, but are rare, and usually don't last very long.

Who is most at risk for a serious case of yersiniosis?

Those most at risk for serious illness are older adults, people with weakened immune systems (ex: those living with HIV or cancer, transplant patients who are receiving immunosuppressive drugs) and patients with too much iron in their blood.

When do the symptoms start and how long do they last?

Symptoms usually begin four to six days after becoming infected with the germ, and can last for one to three weeks.

What causes yersiniosis and how is it spread?

Yersiniosis is spread by the fecal-oral route, a common form of disease transmission where someone becomes infected by touching and ingesting the feces (poop) of infected people or animals (including pets), without following up with proper handwashing).

You can also become infected by eating or drinking contaminated food, especially raw or undercooked pork (including cold cuts), unpasteurized (raw) milk, and untreated water.

Although rare, the germ can be passed on through contaminated blood during a blood transfusion. Yersiniosis is more common during winter than summer.

What should you do if you think you have yersiniosis?

If you think you have yersiniosis, you should see your doctor for testing, advice and treatment.

How is yersiniosis diagnosed?

The diagnosis is confirmed when Yersinia bacteria is found in a person's stool (poop). A sample of the stool must be sent to a lab, which uses special methods to grow and identify the germ. Sometimes, Yersinia bacteria can also be found in the blood.

How is the infection treated?

Most people will recover without any treatment. Your doctor will decide if treatment is necessary in your particular case.

How can I protect myself from yersiniosis?

Here are some ways to reduce your chances of getting yersiniosis.

- Wash your hands with soap and water before and after:
 - using the toilet
 - changing diapers
 - eating or preparing food
 - handling animals (pets, farm animals or wild animals)
- Avoid eating beef, pork or poultry that has not been thoroughly cooked.
- Avoid consuming raw or unpasteurized milk or other raw milk products.
- Thoroughly clean work surfaces used to prepare raw meat and other foods in the kitchen.
- Store and refrigerate food properly and eat within three days, or freeze. (Yersinia grows at refrigerated temperatures.)

* an illness of the stomach and/or bowels

Yersiniosis

- Do not eat any packaged, processed meats after the 'best before' date.
- Do not eat processed meat (cold cuts) that look or smell bad. When in doubt, throw it out.
- Make sure drinking water is safe. Make sure water supply is not contaminated by human or animal feces (poop).
- Avoid drinking untreated surface water (ex: from lakes, rivers, springs, ponds).

Consider Others

Don't pass it on.

If I become infected, how can I avoid passing on yersiniosis to others?

If you become ill with yersiniosis, you should stop working while you have diarrhea and vomiting. It is

recommended you don't go back to work until 48 hours (two days) after your last diarrhea or vomiting incident. This will give you a chance to recover, and will reduce the risk of passing the infection on to others.

Also, all people with yersiniosis should wash their hands often. This is especially important after going to the toilet and before handling food. It is important to realize you can make others sick.

Are there certain jobs where the bacteria can be passed on more easily?

Yes. If you work in a job that involves food handling or close contact with others (ex: kitchens or restaurants, hospitals, daycares, personal care homes), it is especially important that you not return to work until at least 48 hours after your last diarrhea or vomiting incident.

For more information

Talk to your doctor or other health care provider, your local public health unit, or call Health Links-Info Santé at 204-788-8200 in Winnipeg; or toll free 1-888-315-9257 outside Winnipeg.

Information is also available on the Manitoba Health website at www.gov.mb.ca/health/publichealth/cdc/protocol/yersiniosis.pdf.