

Yersiniosis Fact Sheet

What is yersiniosis?

Yersiniosis is a diarrheal illness caused by infection with *Yersinia enterocolitica*, a type of bacterium that is carried by some animals, mainly pigs. Yersiniosis can also be caused by infection with a bacterium called *Yersinia pseudotuberculosis*, but that is less common in the United States.

How common is yersiniosis?

Yersiniosis is not common in the United States. Approximately 50 cases are reported each year in California, but there may be more unreported cases in people who did not seek medical care or did not submit fecal specimens for testing. Young children are the most likely to get yersiniosis. Yersiniosis is more common in winter than in summer.

How does a person get yersiniosis?

Most infections with *Y. enterocolitica* are caused by eating raw or undercooked pork products, or by drinking contaminated raw (unpasteurized) milk or untreated water. Infants can be infected if their caretakers handle raw pork intestines called chitterlings or “chitlins” and then do not wash their hands thoroughly before handling the infant or the infant’s toys, bottles, or pacifiers.

Sometimes infection with *Y. enterocolitica* can occur after contact with infected animals, especially pigs. On rare occasions, a person infected with *Y. enterocolitica* can transmit the bacteria to another person if they do not properly wash their hands after using the toilet.

What are the symptoms of yersiniosis?

Symptoms of yersiniosis include fever, abdominal pain, and diarrhea, which can be bloody. Symptoms usually occur 4 - 7 days after being infected and may last up to three weeks or longer. Adults and older children may have right-sided abdominal pain and fever, which may be confused with appendicitis. In rare cases, complications including skin rash, joint pains, or spread of bacteria to the bloodstream can occur.

How is yersiniosis diagnosed?

Your healthcare provider can order a test of your feces for *Y. enterocolitica*. *Y. enterocolitica* may also be found in other patient samples such as blood, urine, or throat swab, but that is less common.

How is yersiniosis treated?

Most people with diarrhea due to *Y. enterocolitica* will get better without antibiotic treatment. Antibiotics may be used with more severe infections.

How can you prevent yersiniosis?

Hand washing and safe food handling

- Wash your hands with soap and water for at least 20 seconds before eating and preparing food, and after handling raw meat or contact with live animals.
- After handling raw chitterlings (chitlins), clean hands and fingernails thoroughly with soap and water before touching infants or their toys, bottles, or pacifiers.
- Prevent cross contamination in food preparation areas by thoroughly washing your hands, utensils, and food preparation surfaces often, and immediately after they have been in contact with raw meat. Keep raw foods separate from ready-to-eat foods.

Do not consume:

- Raw or undercooked pork.
- Raw (unpasteurized) milk or other raw dairy products.

What is public health doing about yersiniosis?

The California Department of Public Health (CDPH) and local health departments (LHDs) monitor for cases of yersiniosis in California. Healthcare providers are required to report suspected cases of yersiniosis to their LHD. When an outbreak of yersiniosis is identified, CDPH and LHDs will investigate to find the cause of the illness, prevent further infections, and educate the public.

Where can I get more information on yersiniosis?

More information is available from the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention: <http://www.cdc.gov/nczved/divisions/dfbmd/diseases/yersinia/>

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