YERSINIOSIS

What is yersiniosis?

Yersiniosis is a relatively uncommon infection of the intestines caused by a group of bacteria called *Yersinia***. In rare cases, the bacteria may spread to the bloodstream to cause blood infection. Anyone can get yersiniosis, but it occurs more often in infants and children. Yersiniosis usually occurs as a single case, but occasional outbreaks can occur if there is a common exposure to the bacteria.**

What are the symptoms of yersiniosis?

Infection can cause a variety of symptoms depending on the age of the person infected. Common symptoms include:

- Fever
- Diarrhea (often bloody)
- Abdominal pain
- Malaise
- Nausea
- Vomiting

Symptoms may last two to three weeks or longer. In older children and adults, right-sided abdominal pain and fever may be the predominant symptoms and may be confused with appendicitis. In a small number of cases, complications such as skin rash, joint pain or the spread of bacteria to the bloodstream (bacteremia) can occur.

Symptoms generally appear three to seven days after exposure to the bacteria. The period of time that the person is infectious is not known.

How does yersiniosis spread?

Yersinia bacteria are carried by household birds, pets, other domestic animals (reptiles, frogs, turtles, rodents) and pigs. Infected animals pass the bacteria in their feces. People can become infected with *Yersinia* bacteria through:

- Eating contaminated food, especially raw or undercooked pork products. The preparation of raw pork intestines (chitterlings) may be particularly risky
- Eating foods that have been contaminated with *Yersinia* bacteria from raw pork. This can happen during food preparation if you cut raw pork on a cutting board and then use the unwashed board or utensil to prepare vegetables. The vegetable can become contaminated with the bacteria, and if they are eaten without being cooked, they may cause illness
- Eating other contaminated or undercooked meat or seafood (e.g., oysters, fish)
- Drinking unpasteurized milk or contaminated water
- Drinking contaminated water

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- Person to person contact if an infected person does not practice good handwashing, especially after using the bathroom. A person infected with *Yersinia* passes the bacteria in the feces during the time they experience diarrhea, and in some cases for a few weeks or months afterward
- Transfusion with contaminated packed red blood cells from donors who did not have symptoms or had a mild gastrointestinal illness

How is yersiniosis treated?

Most people infected with *Yersinia* will recover without treatment. Babies, particularly those who are three months old or younger, may experience more serious illness and may require medical intervention. Infected people should drink plenty of fluids to prevent dehydration from the diarrhea. Antibiotics are occasionally used to treat severe cases.

How can yersiniosis be prevented?

- Practice good hand hygiene. Wash hands frequently for at least 15 seconds using the six-step method, and especially:
  o After using the washroom
  o Before preparing or eating food
  o After handling raw meat and before handling other foods
  o After handling animals, especially domestic pets
- Avoid drinking raw (unpasteurized) milk and improperly treated water
- Thoroughly cook all animal sources at the appropriate cooking temperatures, especially pork, to an internal temperature of 71°C. *Yersinia* bacteria can grow at refrigeration temperatures, therefore it is important to cook food at the appropriate temperatures
- Prevent cross-contamination in the kitchen; use separate cutting boards for meat and other foods
- Wash cutting boards and utensils with soap and water after contact with raw meat
- Freeze fresh meat, poultry or fish immediately if you cannot use it within a few days

People with symptoms who work in or attend high risk environments, such as food handlers, those who provide patient care or who attend or work in child care, should stay at home until symptom-free for 24 hours.