

Yersiniosis

What is it?

Yersiniosis is a bowel infection caused by the Yersinia bacteria. It is commonly caught from eating contaminated or poorly handled food. Other sources are infected household pets and farm animals – especially pigs. Untreated water or an infected person who handles food can also spread Yersinia bacteria.

What are the symptoms?

Around 1 -11 days after contact with the bacteria flu-like symptoms develop. Diarrhoea then develops, with severe abdominal pain. Nausea, vomiting and fever often occur. Yersinia infection usually lasts for 2 or 3 days, but can last for up to 3 weeks. Sometimes joint pains can develop. In a few people these are severe and disabling.

How is it treated?

Usually extra fluid and rest are recommended. However, a doctor should always be consulted if symptoms are severe and may give further advice or treatment.

How is it spread?

People become infected when they swallow the bacteria. This can happen:

- When handling food, especially undercooked pork or other meats and small goods.
- When consuming unpasteurised milk.
- When drinking from an untreated water supply (e.g. tank or bore water).
- From contact with domestic or farm animals.
- From contact with infected people.

How to prevent it?

- Wash and dry hands carefully:
 - After going to the toilet or changing nappies.
 - Before handling food.
 - After touching uncooked meats.
 - After contact with domestic animals or pets.
- Look after food carefully:
 - Thaw frozen meat completely.
 - Cook meat thoroughly.
 - Keep raw meat separate from other foods in the refrigerator.
 - Store raw foods underneath cooked foods to prevent cross contamination.

- Thoroughly clean knives, cutting boards and other surfaces after contact with raw meats.

Remember

- Wash and dry your hands:
 - after going to the toilet
 - after playing or working with animals
 - before handling food
 - after touching raw meats
 - after contact with animal manure
- Always prepare food carefully.
 - Don't handle food if you have diarrhoea - it may spread the infection to others.
- **Don't donate blood within 3 months of suffering from Yersinia infection as it can be transmitted through blood transfusions.**
 - **If you have had a bloodstream infection with Yersinia (blood poisoning or sepsis/septicaemia) you should not donate blood for six months.**
- Don't work in close contact with infants, the elderly or ill people until you have been symptom free for 48 hours.

For further information contact the Auckland Regional Public Health Service on 09 623 4600

Last updated October 2020