



THE FACTS:

Yersinia Enterocolitica

What is yersiniosis infection?

Yersiniosis is an infectious disease caused by a bacterium of the genus *Yersinia*. In the United States, most human illness is caused by one species, *Y. enterocolitica*. Infection with *Y. enterocolitica* can cause a variety of symptoms depending on the age of the person infected. Infection with *Y. enterocolitica* occurs most often in young children.

Symptoms & Duration: Symptoms in children are fever, abdominal pain, and diarrhea, which is often bloody.

Incubation Period: Symptoms typically develop 4 to 7 days after exposure and may last 1 to 3 weeks or longer.

Recovery, Long Term Effects & Immunity: 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 proportion of cases, complications such as skin rash, joint pains, or spread of bacteria to the bloodstream can occur. Most infections are uncomplicated and resolve completely. Occasionally, some persons develop joint pain, most commonly in the knees, ankles or wrists. These joint pains usually develop about 1 month after the initial episode of diarrhea and generally resolve after 1 to 6 months. A skin rash, called "erythema nodosum," may also appear on the legs and trunk; this is more common in women. In most cases, erythema nodosum resolves spontaneously within a month.

How is Yersiniosis Spread?

The major animal reservoir for *Y. enterocolitica* strains that cause human illness is pigs, but other strains are also found in many other animals including rodents, rabbits, sheep, cattle, horses, dogs, and cats. In pigs, the bacteria are most likely to be found on the tonsils. Infection is most often acquired by eating contaminated food, especially raw or undercooked pork products. The preparation of raw pork intestines (chitterlings) may be particularly risky. Infants can be infected if their caretakers handle raw chitterlings and then do not adequately clean their hands before handling the infant or the infant's toys, bottles, or pacifiers. Drinking contaminated unpasteurized milk or untreated water can also transmit the infection. Occasionally *Y. enterocolitica* infection occurs after contact with infected animals. On rare occasions, it can be transmitted as a result of the bacterium passing from the stools or soiled fingers of one person to the mouth of another person. This may happen when basic hygiene and handwashing habits are inadequate. Rarely, the organism is transmitted through contaminated blood during a transfusion.

How common is infection with *Y. enterocolitica*?

Y. enterocolitica is a relatively infrequent cause of diarrhea and abdominal pain. Based on data from the Foodborne Diseases Active Surveillance Network (FoodNet), which measures the burden and sources of specific diseases over time, approximately one culture-confirmed *Y. enterocolitica* infection per 100,000 persons occurs each year. Children are infected more often than adults, and the infection is more common in the winter.

How can *Y. enterocolitica* infections be treated?

Uncomplicated cases of diarrhea due to *Y. enterocolitica* usually resolve on their own without antibiotic treatment. However, in more severe or complicated infections, antibiotics such as aminoglycosides, doxycycline, trimethoprim-sulfamethoxazole, or fluoroquinolones may be useful.

How Do You Prevent Yersiniosis Infection?

1. Avoid eating raw or undercooked pork.
2. Consume only pasteurized milk or milk products.
3. Wash hands with soap and water before eating and preparing food, after contact with animals, and after handling raw meat.
4. After handling raw chitterlings, clean hands and fingernails scrupulously with soap and water before touching infants or their toys, bottles, or pacifiers. Someone other than the foodhandler should care for children while chitterlings are being prepared.
5. Prevent cross-contamination in the kitchen: -Use separate cutting boards for meat and other foods. Carefully clean all cutting boards, counter-tops, and utensils with soap and hot water after preparing raw meat.
6. Dispose of animal feces in a sanitary manner.

***For Further Information Contact the Infectious Disease Program at 625-8318
or toll free 1-888-294-6630, ext 8318.***



Adapted from CDC Centers for Disease Control and Prevention

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