

# YERSINIOSIS (*Yersinia enterocolitica*)

## What is it?

*Yersinia enterocolitica* is a bacterium that causes an illness called yersiniosis.

## What are the symptoms?

Infection with *Y. enterocolitica* occurs most often in young children. Common symptoms in children are fever, abdominal pain, and diarrhea, which is often bloody. In older children and adults, right-sided abdominal pain and fever may be confused with symptoms of appendicitis. In a small proportion of cases, complications such as skin rash, joint pains, or a blood infection can occur. Symptoms usually begin 4 to 7 days after being exposed to the bacteria.

## How long does it last?

The symptoms usually last for 1 to 3 weeks. People with mild symptoms usually recover on their own without treatment.

## How is it spread?

*Y. enterocolitica* is found in wild and domestic animals, especially pigs. It can also be found in birds, reptiles, rodents, rabbits, sheep, cattle, horses, dogs, and cats.

People can become infected with *Y. enterocolitica* by:

- Eating contaminated food, especially raw or undercooked pork products. Preparing chitterlings (pork intestines) may be especially risky.
- Drinking unpasteurized milk or contaminated water.
- Contact with farm animals or pets.
- Touching contaminated surfaces or objects and then touching their mouth or putting a contaminated object into their mouth.
- Eating food prepared by someone infected with *Yersinia* who did not practice proper handwashing.

## What should I do if I have symptoms?

- Contact your health care provider.
- Wash your hands often.

## How can I prevent yersiniosis?

- Cook all pork products thoroughly.
- After handling raw chitterlings, clean hands and fingernails with soap and water before touching infants or their toys, bottles, or pacifiers. Someone other than the food handler should care for children while chitterlings are being prepared.
- Don't drink unpasteurized milk.
- Prevent cross-contamination in the kitchen by washing hands, cutting boards, countertops, knives, utensils, and other surfaces after handling raw foods.
- Wash your hands with warm, soapy water for 20 seconds
  - ✓ After using the bathroom
  - ✓ After changing diapers
  - ✓ After touching animals
  - ✓ Before eating or preparing food
- Don't drink untreated water from lakes, rivers, streams, ponds, or shallow wells.
- Wash your hands more often when someone in your household is sick.
- Avoid preparing food for others while you have symptoms.

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**To report a suspected foodborne illness, call the Minnesota Department of Health Foodborne Illness Hotline at 1-877-FOOD-ILL (or 651-201-5655 from the Twin Cities).**

