

# Yersiniosis (Yersinia) Information Sheet

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## What is it?

Yersiniosis, pronounced "yer-sin-ee-oh-sis", is an infection of the bowel or blood caused by the *Yersinia* bacteria which live in the guts of people and animals (especially pigs, birds, cats and dogs). When a person, bird or animal is infected they also have the *Yersinia* bacteria in their poo.

## What are the signs and symptoms?

Symptoms usually start within a few days, but generally under 10 days, after contact with *Yersinia* bacteria.

Symptoms include:

- diarrhoea, pronounced dy-a-rea (runny poo)
- stomach cramps (which can be confused with appendicitis in older children and adults)
- vomiting
- fever.

Some people also have headache, sore throat and joint pains. Some people with yersiniosis do not have symptoms but they still have the bacteria in their gut and poo.

Symptoms usually last 2 to 3 days but can last as long as 3 weeks. It is possible to have yersiniosis more than once.

## How serious is it?

Yersiniosis is not usually serious and most people recover quickly without having to see a doctor. If the symptoms are severe, a person may need to go to hospital, particularly if they are very young or elderly and get dehydrated.

A person should see a doctor or nurse if they:

- are less than 6 months old
- have runny poo and stomach cramps for more than 24 hours or symptoms get worse

- have a high temperature, go pale or limp or are unusually tired, drowsy or irritable
- have blood, mucus or pus in their poo
- are not drinking enough and show signs of dehydration, such as not weeing or only producing small amounts of dark wee and/or have a dry mouth
- have other health problems or symptoms.

If you have seen a doctor or nurse and your symptoms do not improve or get worse, you will need to see them again.

Yersiniosis is a notifiable disease under the Health Act. This means your doctor must tell the District Health Board (DHB) if you have it. People with yersiniosis who work in jobs where it could be easily spread, such as working with food, or in childcare or health care, will be contacted by a Health Protection Officer to work out how they got yersiniosis and to help stop others from getting sick.

## Who is most at risk?

*Yersinia* affects people of all ages but occurs most often in young children. You are more likely to get yersiniosis if you have contact with sick animals, have poor hand or food hygiene, drink raw milk or drink untreated water.

Children who are 5 years old and younger, adults over 65 years old and people with weakened immune systems are the most likely to have severe symptoms.

## How could I get infected?

You get infected when you swallow the *Yersinia* bacteria. This can happen when you:

- eat undercooked pork or pork products
- touch raw pork
- drinking unpasteurised (raw) milk

- drink untreated water. Animals can contaminate water collected from roofs, bores, creeks, lakes and streams
- have contact with infected farm animals (such as pigs), birds and household pets (such as cats and dogs)
- have contact with an infected person.

You can infect other people while the *Yersinia* bacteria is in your body and poo – this can be up to 3 months after symptoms started.

### *How do I protect myself and others?*

There is no vaccine to prevent yersiniosis.

#### *To avoid getting yersiniosis:*

- regularly wash your hands with soap and dry them thoroughly, especially after contact with animals, going to the toilet, changing a nappy, caring for a sick person and before preparing (especially raw pork)
- always thoroughly cook pork and pork products (until the juices run clear)
- do not drink raw (unpasteurised) milk
- store raw meat and poultry separate from other foods at the bottom of the fridge
- wash fruits and vegetables carefully with safe water, particularly if you eat them raw
- wash hands, kitchen work surfaces and utensils with soap and water immediately after they have been in contact with raw meat or poultry
- avoid contact with sick animals and take your pet to the vet if it has runny poo
- only drink water that is treated and known to be safe. If you are not sure if the water is safe boil it first. If you have your own water supply, protect it from animal and bird poo and treat the water.

#### *To avoid spreading yersiniosis:*

- regularly wash and dry your hands thoroughly
- do not go swimming in pools until you have had no symptoms for 2 weeks
- do not prepare food for others until you have had no symptoms for 48 hours (2 days)
- do not donate blood for three months after having yersiniosis as it is possible to transmit the illness through blood transfusions.

### *Will I need to take time off work, school or preschool?*

Anyone with diarrhoea or vomiting should not go to work, school or day-care until they have had no symptoms for 2 days. This is especially important for food handlers, health care workers, childcare workers and children at school or day-care.

### *How is it treated?*

There is no specific treatment for yersiniosis. Most people with yersiniosis can be looked after at home and will not need to see a doctor. It is important to rest and drink lots of water to prevent dehydration. More severe cases of yersiniosis may need antibiotics.

### *Where can I get further information?*

For further information on yersiniosis please contact your doctor or Hawke's Bay District Health Board Population Health on (06) 834 1815. You can also phone Healthline on 0800 611 116 at any time of the day or night to speak to a registered nurse.