

Yersiniosis

This is a bacterial infection of the bowel caused by *Yersinia enterocolitica*. It occurs worldwide, but is fairly uncommon.

Many domesticated and wild animals carry *Yersinia* in their intestines. Spread to people occurs by eating food or water contaminated by infected human or animal faeces. Contact with infected pets and domestic stock may also cause infection.

Symptoms vary with age and are commonest in young children. They include:

- > fever
- > diarrhoea, often bloody in young children
- > abdominal pain and cramps
- > symptoms similar to appendicitis in older children and adults
- > joint pain occurs in half of affected adults.

The diagnosis is usually made by growing *Yersinia* from a faecal specimen.

Yersinia is able to multiply at temperatures in normal refrigerators, so sometimes if meat is kept without freezing large numbers of the bacteria may be present. It is also occasionally transmitted by blood transfusion as it is able to multiply in stored blood products. This is why people are asked not to donate blood if they have had diarrhoea recently.

Incubation period

(time between becoming infected and developing symptoms)

Symptoms typically develop 4 – 7 days after exposure.

Infectious period

(time during which an infected person can infect others)

Usually 2 – 3 weeks. If not treated with antibiotics, the organism may be shed in the faeces for 2 – 3 months.

Treatment

Effective antibiotic treatment is available.

Control of spread

- > Exclude from child care, preschool, school and work until there has been no diarrhoea for 24 hours.
- > Cook all meat thoroughly.
- > Good food handling procedures should be followed.
- > Follow good hand washing and keeping areas clean procedures.
- > Wash hands after contact with farm animals, pets, animal faeces or animal environments.
- > Don't drink unpasteurised milk.
- > Anyone with diarrhoea should avoid swimming in pools.



Yersiniosis is a notifiable disease

- > Hand Hygiene
- > Keeping Areas Clean
- > Preventing Food Poisoning at Home
- > Collecting a Faecal Sample