



# Yersinia

## What is Yersinia?

Yersinia infection is caused by a group of bacteria called Yersinia. These bacteria are found worldwide, including in New Brunswick. They live in the intestines of infected people and animals. The bacteria cause gastrointestinal illness and are passed in the feces. These bacteria are one of the most common causes of diarrhea.

## What are the symptoms?

Symptoms usually appear within three to 7 days after a person becomes infected with the bacteria. Most persons who become ill have abdominal pain and fever however children and some adults may also have bloody diarrhea. In some persons serious illness can develop.

## How is Yersinia spread?

Yersinia bacteria are passed in the feces from infected persons and animals. The bacteria can be found in soil, food, water or on surfaces contaminated with feces. The bacteria are spread by animal-person contact, by eating contaminated food or by drinking contaminated water; less common is by person to person contact. Most cases are associated with improperly handling or eating raw or undercooked pork and other meats. Yersinia infection can also be spread by contact of cooked foods with raw pork or meats on unwashed cutting boards or knives.

Some examples of how the bacteria can be spread:

- Eating contaminated food, especially raw or undercooked pork products;
- Ingesting contaminated drinking or recreational water;
- Putting something in your mouth that has come into contact with the droppings of infected animals or stool of infected humans;
- Children putting their hand in their mouth after or during playing with infected puppies and kittens;
- Drinking unpasteurized milk or milk products.

## How is Yersinia infection diagnosed?

Diagnosis of infection is based on assessment of clinical symptoms by a health care provider and laboratory testing of a stool sample.

## A-Z DISEASE FACT SHEETS

### Who is at risk of Yersinia infection?

Anyone exposed to the bacteria can become infected. Young children, the elderly, and persons with weakened immune systems are at greater risk of developing more serious disease. Most people will recover without specific treatment.

### How can Yersinia infection be prevented?

**Use good environmental management.** Flush or discard any stool in the toilet and clean surrounding area using hot water and detergent. A chlorine-based disinfectant is recommended.

**Practice good personal hygiene.** Wash hands thoroughly with soap and water after using the toilet or changing a diaper, after handling animals or contact with animal feces; after handling raw pork; and before preparing or eating food.

**Take food safety precautions.** Wash and/or peel all raw vegetables and fruits before eating. Thoroughly cook all meats. Prevent contact of cooked foods with raw meat. Drink and eat only pasteurized dairy products (milk, cheese, and yogurt).

**Drink properly treated water.** Avoid swallowing recreational waters from swimming pools and hot tubs. Do not drink untreated surface water from lakes or streams. Test private well drinking water regularly (once or twice per year).

### How is Yersinia infection treated?

Persons with diarrhea should drink a lot of liquids to avoid dehydration, stay home when ill; and practice good personal hygiene like hand washing. Avoid preparing food for others while you have symptoms and for 48 hours after you recover. Consult your health care provider for advice and treatment if you have bloody or severe diarrhea; prescription medicines can be used.

### What is the public health response?

Health care providers and laboratories are required to confidentially notify cases to Public Health. Public Health staff may investigate to find out how the infection occurred, identify other people who may be at risk of infection, implement control measures, and provide advice as necessary; including exclusion of infected workers in high risk occupations like persons involved in food handling, direct patient care, and care of the young (daycare) or the elderly (institutional settings).

## A-Z DISEASE FACT SHEETS

### Further Information

For additional information, contact your health-care provider, local Public Health office or Tele-Care 811.

### Useful websites

Public Health Agency of Canada

<http://www.phac-aspc.gc.ca/>

Health Canada

<http://www.hc-sc.gc.ca>

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Last reviewed: November 2023