

Yersinia

Information Sheet

What is it?

Yersinia infection (or Yersiniosis) is caused by bacteria that are found in the gut of people, animals such as deer, pigs, cats and dogs, and birds. It is passed on in the faeces (stool, poo, tūtae) of infected people, animals and birds.

Yersinia infection is a notifiable disease under the Health Act 1956. People suffering from the illness will be contacted by their local Health Protection Officer to try and establish the source of their illness.

How does a person become infected?

People become infected when they swallow the bacteria. This may be from:

- Swallowing contaminated food or sucking or mouthing contaminated objects. Food and objects can be contaminated by someone who is infected and does not wash their hands after going to the toilet, or someone who is nursing a person with Yersiniosis and does not wash their hands afterwards.
- Eating improperly cooked pork, pork products or poultry.
- Handling raw meat and chicken, or items that have come into contact with the meat, and not washing hands properly afterwards.
- From drinking raw (unpasteurised) milk.
- From drinking untreated water from streams, rivers, shallow bores or roof water that has been contaminated with the faeces of animals or people.
- From not washing hands after touching animals and birds, especially farm animals, pets and chickens, and then touching your mouth.

What are the signs and symptoms of the illness?

The illness usually takes from 3 to 7 days (generally less than 10 days) for the symptoms to show after you have been infected. The symptoms are diarrhoea (sometimes containing blood), stomach cramps, vomiting and fever. Headache, sore throat and joint pains may also occur.

Children are more likely to suffer from diarrhoea while older children and adults often suffer from stomach cramps, these often mimicking appendicitis.

Some people become infected but do not have any symptoms. As they are passing the bacteria in their faeces, they are infectious to others.

Diagnosis can only be confirmed by faecal (stool, poo, tūtae) tests arranged by a doctor.

How bad is it?

The illness is unpleasant but Yersiniosis is not normally a long lasting or severe illness. A person normally recovers within three weeks.

For advice, testing and treatment, you will need to visit your doctor. There is no specific treatment and most people generally recover without treatment. If your case is severe or you have other health problems, your doctor may prescribe antibiotics.

Drink plenty of fluids when you have diarrhoea to prevent dehydration. This is especially important for sick children. Go back to your doctor if your child is not drinking.

While you have symptoms you are infectious to others. As the bacteria may take some time to leave the gut after recovery, you may be infectious for several weeks after the illness has gone. Untreated cases may excrete the bacteria for 2-3 months so personal hygiene after toileting is very important.

There is no immunity after the infection so you can contract the illness again.

Will I need time off school, childcare or work?

Your Public Health Nurse or Health Protection Officer at your local Public Health Unit can give you advice on this. Usually you can go back to work if you are free from symptoms.

- People who work in the food industry, early childhood centre workers and healthcare workers should not return to work until they have been symptom-free for 48 hours.
- Children must not return to childcare (kindergartens, childcare centres, playcentres, kohanga reo) or school until they have been symptom-free for 48 hours.

As you may be infectious for some time after recovery, it is important that you wash and dry your hands properly after toileting.

How do I avoid the illness?

- Always wash and dry hands thoroughly:
 - after going to the toilet
 - after changing a child's nappy or cleaning up 'accidents'
 - before and after preparing food, especially raw meats
 - after touching or handling animals or their faeces (stool, poo, tūtae)
 - after nursing a person with Yersiniosis
- Thoroughly cook all meats.
- Keep raw meat and chicken separate from cooked foods during preparation and storage.
- Wash chopping boards, utensils and equipment after preparing raw meat.
- Always treat or boil drinking water sourced from streams, rivers, shallow bores or the roof.

For further information please contact:



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