Yersiniosis

What is yersiniosis?
Yersiniosis is an infection caused by bacteria called Yersinia. The bacteria are found in the feces (stool) of infected people, and in wild and domestic animals.

What are symptoms of yersiniosis?
Symptoms include watery diarrhea, abdominal pain (similar to appendicitis), nausea, vomiting, and fever. If not treated with antibiotics, symptoms may last 1-3 weeks or longer, and the bacteria may remain in a person’s stool for 2 to 3 months. Some people can be infected and never have symptoms.

How soon do symptoms appear?
Symptoms usually appear 3-7 days after exposure and possibly up to 10 days.

How is yersiniosis spread?
A person may become ill with yersiniosis after eating contaminated food, especially raw or undercooked pork, or by drinking contaminated water. Yersiniosis can also be spread by having contact with infected animals or less commonly infected people. Unpasteurized milk can be another possible source for yersiniosis as well as the preparation of chitterlings (pig intestines). In rare cases the bacteria which causes the illness has been transmitted through blood transfusions.

How long is a person infectious (contagious)?
Transmission from person to person is very rare, but could occur while the infected person has symptoms, and possibly up to 2-3 months after if the ill person is not treated with antibiotics.

How is yersiniosis diagnosed and treated?
Yersiniosis is diagnosed by stool culture. Antibiotics may be prescribed as a treatment.

How can I prevent a yersiniosis infection?
1. Wash your hands well for 20 seconds after going to the bathroom or changing diapers.
2. Make sure children wash their hands well after going to the bathroom.
3. Wash your hands well before eating and preparing food and after handling raw meat.
4. After handling raw chitterlings (pig intestines), clean hands and fingernails well with soap and water, especially before touching infants or their toys, bottles, or pacifiers. Someone other than the food handler should care for children while chitterlings are being prepared.
5. Prevent cross-contamination in the kitchen by using separate cutting boards for meat and other food.
6. Carefully clean all cutting boards, counter-tops and utensils with soap and hot water after preparing raw meat.
7. Wash your hands well after handling animals and their waste.
8. During the slaughtering of pigs, remove the head and neck from the body to avoid contaminating meat from the heavily colonized pharynx.
8. Avoid eating raw or undercooked pork.
9. Use only pasteurized milk or milk products.
10. Disinfect all utensils and kitchen surfaces after contact with raw meat. Use a bleach solution to sanitize the kitchen area.

Yersiniosis is a Washington State reportable disease and must be reported to your local health department. In Snohomish County, contact Communicable Disease Surveillance and Response at 425.339.5278, Monday through Friday, 8:00 AM - 5:00 PM.