

**What is *Helicobacter pylori* (*H. pylori*)?**

It is bacteria found in the mucus layer of the stomach lining or first part of the small intestine, which causes more than 90% of ulcers. Ulcers are sores in the lining of the stomach. Before 1982, when this bacterium was discovered, spicy food, acid, stress, and lifestyle were considered the major causes of ulcers. Since we now know that most ulcers are caused by an infection with *H. pylori*, most cases can be treated and cured with appropriate antibiotics.

**What are the symptoms of *H. pylori*?**

The most common ulcer symptom is gnawing or burning pain in the stomach area between the breastbone and the navel. Commonly, the pain occurs when the stomach is empty, between meals and in the early morning hours, but it can also occur at other times of the day. Less common ulcer symptoms include nausea, vomiting, and loss of appetite. Bleeding can also occur; prolonged bleeding may cause anemia leading to weakness and fatigue. If bleeding is heavy, one or more of the following signs may occur: vomiting blood, passing bloody stools, and/or the presence of dark stools or dark vomit, which may indicate old bleeding.

**How is *H. pylori* spread?**

It is not known how *H. pylori* is transmitted or why some people become symptomatic while others do not. The bacteria are most likely spread from person to person through fecal-oral or oral-oral routes. Possible environmental reservoirs include contaminated water sources.

**Who gets *H. pylori*?**

About two-thirds of the world's population is infected with *H. pylori*. In the United States, *H. pylori* are found more often in older adults, African Americans, Hispanics, and among people in lower socioeconomic groups. We do not know how *H. pylori* get into the body or why some people with *H. pylori* become ill while others do not. The bacteria most likely spread from person to person through the fecal-oral route (when infected fecal matter comes in contact with hands, food, or water and is swallowed) or the oral-oral route (when infected saliva or vomit comes in contact with hands, food, or water and is swallowed).

**What is the treatment for this illness?**

The treatment for *H. pylori* infection consists of 1-2 weeks of one or two effective antibiotics. Successful treatment rates range from 70 to 90% depending on the regimen used. Antibiotic resistance and patient noncompliance are the two major reasons for treatment failure.

**What can be done to help prevent the spread of these viruses?**

Since the source of *H. pylori* is not yet known, recommendations for avoiding infection have not been made. In general, it is always wise for persons to wash hands thoroughly, to eat food that has been properly prepared, and to only drink water from a safe, clean source.