

H what? Things you need to know about *H pylori* infection.

Helicobacter pylori (HEL-ik-oh BAK-ter pie-LOR-ee) is an infection. When found in the stomach, it is known to cause some problems, including stomach ulcers. In fact, while spicy foods can make an ulcer feel worse, they are not the cause of stomach ulcers as once believed—most ulcers are caused by *H pylori* infection.

Another important thing to know about *H pylori* is that it is considered to be something that causes cancer in humans. Although most people with *H pylori* don't get cancer, most people *with* stomach cancer get it as a result of *H pylori* infection.

Who gets *H pylori*?

Anyone can get *H pylori*. About half the world's population has it. In the United States about 1 in 3 people are affected, although it is more common among non-Hispanic black and Hispanic Americans, and most common among people from Southeast Asia.

.....

1 in 3

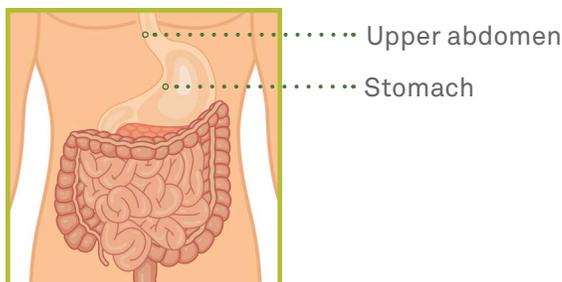
Americans have *H pylori* infection

.....

How does *H pylori* make you feel sick?

The *H pylori* infection is caused by a spiral-shaped bug. The bug spirals into the stomach's protective lining, damaging it and allowing stomach acids to get through to the stomach wall. The bug can also irritate stomach cells and cause too much stomach acid.

In many cases *H pylori* won't become active and make someone sick. When it does, problems can include "heartburn" located below the chest and above the stomach (an area called the upper abdomen) that lasts or keeps happening.



How is it spread?

H pylori is thought to spread through contaminated food and water and through direct contact with saliva. In most cases, the infection happens during childhood, especially in children living in poor, crowded areas with poor waste removal.

What is the treatment for *H pylori*?

Once active *H pylori* infection has been diagnosed, treatment may include the following:

- Bacteria-killing drugs called antibiotics
- A medication such as Pepto-Bismol
- Another medicine to reduce the acid in the stomach

At least 4 weeks after treatment is finished, you should be tested again to make sure the *H pylori* infection is gone. Just remember *test-treat-test*.

.....

Retest **4 weeks** after treatment is finished

.....

Does treatment prevent stomach cancer?

There is some proof that early treatment of *H pylori* can reduce the risk of stomach cancer, although more proof is needed for doctors to be sure. Fortunately, only a very small number of *H pylori* patients—fewer than 1 in 1,000—will get stomach cancer.

Should I be tested?

If you have “heartburn” that lasts or keeps coming back, or you are in a higher-risk group, you should consider asking your doctor about *H pylori* testing.

How can I learn whether I have *H pylori*?

For many people 55 and under, medical guidelines recommend one of two types of tests to learn if you're infected with *H pylori*: the breath test or the stool test.

Why is my doctor ordering a second *H pylori* test after I've finished my antibiotics?

About a quarter of the time, people may still have *H pylori* infection after treatment. This could be due to the antibiotics not working or because the medications were not taken as prescribed. Retesting is important to confirm that this bacteria no longer lives in your stomach.

Testing instructions

Breath test: The breath test can be performed either in the doctor's office or at a Quest Diagnostics Patient Service Center. *Steps for collection are below*



1. After fasting for 1 hour, breathe into a blue collection bag



2. Drink a solution your healthcare provider gives you



3. Wait 15 minutes



4. Breathe into a second, pink collection bag

The lab checks for changes between the first and second samples that tell whether you have *H pylori*. Your doctor receives the lab results and discusses them with you.

Stool test: *Steps for collection are below*



1. During a doctor visit, you are given a stool collection kit



2. Either at the doctor's office or at home, collect a small stool sample in a clean vial. (IMPORTANT: KEEP SAMPLE REFRIGERATED)



3. Drop sample at the nearest Quest Diagnostics Patient Service Center or bring it back to your doctor's office

The lab checks to see if your sample shows you have an *H pylori* infection. Your doctor receives the lab results and discusses them with you.

Both the breath test and stool test are highly accurate. An advantage of the breath test is that if your doctor suspects *H pylori*, the test can be taken during the same visit where you told him/her about your symptoms. Both tests should be covered by insurance.

Scope test: If you are older than 55 or have what doctors call “alarm symptoms” such as stomach bleeding, medical experts recommend testing for *H pylori* using a procedure called an endoscopy (en-DOSS-ko-pee). This test is performed in the hospital. It is considered very accurate but is only used in certain cases.



⋮ If you have any questions about testing for *H pylori*, be sure to ask your doctor.