

Gastric Condition

Helicobacter pylori (H. pylori)



What is H. pylori ?

H. pylori, or Helicobacter pylori, is a bacterium found in the stomachs of about two-thirds of the world's population. While most infected people will never develop disease, H. pylori causes most stomach and small intestine ulcers. It has been estimated that between 2 percent to 20 percent of people infected with H. pylori will develop ulcers. This infection also increases the risk of MALT lymphoma, gastric cancer, and possibly pancreatic cancer

Who is likely to have H. pylori ?

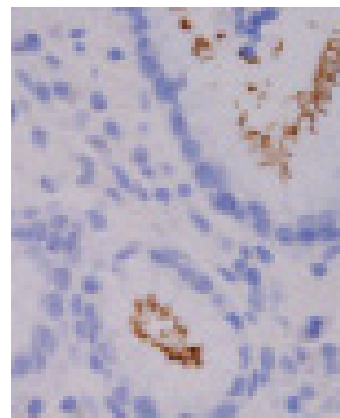
H. pylori infection rates are higher in developing nations than in Europe and North America because scientists believe the bacterium is spread through contaminated food and water or direct mouth-to-mouth contact. Poor children living in crowded conditions are most likely to become infected.

What characterizes H. pylori infection?

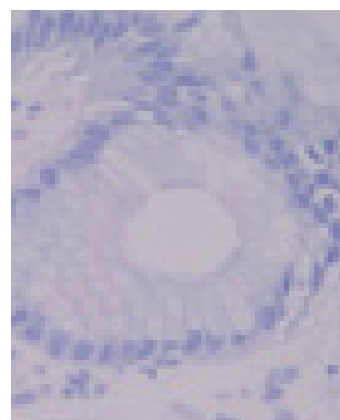
H. pylori infection can cause abdominal pain but may be painless. The infection is usually not discovered until a physician investigates the cause of stomach pain. In many cases, stomach lining inflammation or ulcers have already developed. Other symptoms of ulcers include loss of appetite or weight, vomiting, bloody stool, or anemia.

How does the pathologist diagnose H. pylori?

If you have symptoms of H. pylori infection, your primary care physician can recommend simple tests for the pathologist to examine. They include a **blood antibody test, urea breath test, stool antigen test, and endoscopic biopsy**. While the blood, breath, and stool tests can verify the presence of an infection, a biopsy is required to examine the inflammation and ulcers H. pylori causes. During the biopsy procedure, a physician inserts a flexible viewing tube (endoscope) through the mouth, down the esophagus, and into the stomach and small intestine. The physician operates tiny forceps at the end of the tube to remove small tissue samples, or biopsies, from the ulcerated or inflamed areas for the pathologist to examine under a microscope



Stomach with H. pylori infection.



Stomach without H. pylori infection.

For more information, go to www.cancer.gov (National Cancer Institute) or www.medicinenet.com (Medicine Net, a service of Web MD). Type the keywords H. pylori into the search box.

Definitions

Antibiotic:

A drug used to treat a bacterial infection.

Gastric:

Relating to the stomach

Gastric:

Mucosa-associated lymphoid tissue (MALT) lymphoma is a type of gastric cancer associated with H. pylori bacterium infection. The risk of developing MALT lymphoma is six times higher in those infected with H. pylori than in uninfected people.

Ulcers:

Painful holes or abrasions in the lining of the stomach or upper small intestine, caused in many cases by H. pylori.

Pathologist:

A physician who examines tissues and fluids to diagnose disease in order to assist in making treatment decisions.



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