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STUDY: 69% Of Pork Contaminated By Bacteria

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A sample of raw pork products from supermarkets around the United States found that yersinia enterocolitica, a lesser-known food-borne pathogen, was present in 69 percent of the products tested, according to a study released today by Consumer Reports.



The bacteria infects more than 100,000 Americans a year, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, but for every case that is confirmed with a laboratory test, about 120 more cases escape diagnosis. Symptoms can include fever, cramps and bloody diarrhea.

For its sample, Consumer Reports included the same pork products millions of Americans buy every day at their supermarkets. The study included 148 pork chops and 50 ground pork samples from around the United States.

In the samples tested, 69 percent tested positive for yersinia and 11 percent for enterococcus, which can indicate fecal contamination that can lead to urinary-tract infections. Salmonella and listeria, the more well-known bacterium, registered at 4 percent and 3 percent, respectively.

"The results were concerning," Urvashi Rangan, one of the authors of the report, told ABCNews.com. "It's hard to say that there was no problem. It shows that there needs to be better hygiene at animal plants. Yersinia wasn't even being monitored for."

In a written statement, the Pork Producer's Council questioned the methods used by Consumer Reports, saying the number of samples tested, 198, did "not provide a nationally informative estimate of the true prevalence of the cited bacteria on meat."

Despite the findings, Rangan said it's good to know that the bacteria can be killed by cooking the pork properly and by being vigilant about cross-contamination.

Pork cuts should be cooked to 145 degrees, while ground pork needs to reach a temperature of 160 degrees to kill the bacteria.

"Anything that touches raw meat should go into the dishwasher before touching anything else," Rangan said. "Juices from raw meat that touch the counter should be washed with hot soapy water."

The U.S. Department of Agriculture said the findings "affirm that companies are meeting the established guidelines for protecting the public's health.

"USDA will remain vigilant against emerging and evolving threats to the safety of America's supply of

meat, poultry and processed egg products, and we will continue to work with the industry to ensure companies are following food safety procedures in addition to looking for new ways to strengthen the protection of public health," the department said in a statement.

(ABC News' Dr. Anita Chu contributed reporting.)

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