What is Helicobacter pylori (H. pylori)?

*Helicobacter pylori* (H. pylori) is a type of bacteria that can enter your body and live in the lining of your stomach.

How do you get infected with H. pylori?

Most people will get *H. pylori* during their childhood. However, it is most likely that you can get *H. pylori* infection from unclean food, water or eating utensils. The infection may also be spread through direct contact with saliva of infected people.

How common is *H. pylori* infection?

It is estimated that more than half of the world’s population are infected. It is more common in Middle Easterns, Asians and Eastern Europeans population. The prevalence in Malaysia is estimated at 13.5-51.7% (KL Goh 2009).
What diseases do *H. pylori* cause?

Most people with *H. pylori* infection usually do not develop any symptoms or diseases. It is still not known why certain people developed ulcers from the infection while others do not.

**Common diseases caused by *H. pylori*** are:

**Gastritis**

Gastritis is the inflammation of the stomach lining. In some cases, gastritis can lead to peptic ulcer, gastrointestinal bleed or even perforation. Burning stomach pain, nausea, vomiting and feeling of fullness are common symptoms.

**Peptic Ulcer**

A peptic ulcer refers to painful open sore in the lining of the stomach or the upper part of the small intestine. Symptoms include burning stomach pain, heartburn, feeling of fullness, bloating, frequent belching or even food intolerance. If left untreated, it can perforate your stomach or small intestine, causing bleed, shock or even death.

**Stomach Cancer**

*H. pylori* infection increases the risk of stomach cancer but only in a small minority of infected people. Symptoms are similar to gastritis and peptic ulcer, but are more severe.

How is *H. pylori* diagnosed?

**Urea Breath Test**

A breath test shows if you’re infected by analysing a sample of your breath. The test is simple, quick, safe and accurate. It can also be used to check if the infection has been successfully treated or not.

**Endoscopy**

The doctor will pass a flexible tube into your stomach, which allows small samples to be taken. *H. pylori* can be detected by looking at the samples under the microscope or using a chemical reaction (Rapid urease test/ CLO test).

**Stool antigen**

A stool sample is given and used to detect *H. pylori* antibodies or antigen in the stool.

**Serum blood test**

It can detect specific antibodies that the body’s immune system develops in response to the *H. pylori* infection. However, it is unable to tell if it is an active infection or a previous infection.

Who should be tested for *H. pylori*?

Diagnostic testing for *H. pylori* infection is recommended if you have active gastritis or peptic ulcers.

How should *H. pylori* be treated?

There are no single drug that is effective to treat *H. pylori*. Drugs for *H. pylori* infection are usually given in combination.

Treatment combination includes an acid suppressor and ulcer healing drug (ie omeprazole, lansoprazole, esomeprazole, pantoprazole) and two different antibiotics (ie Amoxicillin, Clarithromycin, Metronidazole, Tetracycline etc). Treatment duration is for two weeks. Resistant cases may require additional treatment as advised by your doctor.

Am I likely to become infected again?

No. The risk of being re-infected is very low at approximately 0.5-1.0% per year.

What can you do to prevent *H. pylori* infection?

To help prevent infection, ensure to follow good hygiene practices including proper hand washing, eating properly washed and cooked food and to drink water from safe, clean source.