

Fact Sheet: E. coli

What is E. coli?

E. coli are bacteria that normally live in the intestines of humans and animals. There are many strains of E. coli bacteria. Most of them are harmless. However, one particular strain, E. coli O157:H7, may cause serious illness in people.

What are the symptoms?

- Diarrhea (which often becomes bloody)
- Stomach cramps
- Usually no fever
- Severe infections may lead to kidney failure

Symptoms appear from 2 to 10 days after exposure, usually 3 to 4 days.

How is it spread?

E. coli can be spread from cattle to people through eating raw or undercooked beef (especially ground beef). It can also be spread by consuming contaminated water or foods such as melons, lettuce, spinach, apple cider, alfalfa sprouts, or unpasteurized milk. Infected individuals may spread the illness to others by not washing their hands well after a bowel movement. An adult infected with E. coli is contagious for a week. However, children may be contagious for up to 3 weeks.

This fact sheet is for information only and is not meant to be used for self-diagnosis or as a substitute for consultation with a health care provider. For more information call your health care provider or call Washtenaw County Public Health at 734-544-6700.

How is it treated?

- If you think you have been exposed, call your doctor immediately for a stool sample test and treatment recommendations. As with any diarrhea, it is important to drink plenty of fluids (such as fruit juice and water) to prevent dehydration.
- If you are a food service worker, a health care worker, or a childcare worker: report your illness to your supervisor and do not work until your illness is over and your medical provider says it is OK to return to work.

How is it prevented?

- Wash all fruits and vegetables thoroughly with soap and water before eating.
- Fully cook all ground beef products to 160 degrees Fahrenheit (use a thermometer).
- Wash hands thoroughly after handling raw hamburger.
- Keep thawing and uneaten cooked foods in the refrigerator.
- Do not place cooked meat on the same plate that was used to hold raw meat.
- Use two cutting boards, one for meat and one for other foods. Wash and disinfect cutting boards and counters after each use with antibacterial soap or a solution of one-tablespoon bleach in one-half cup water (make a fresh solution everyday).
- Consume only pasteurized milk and milk products.
- Wash hands after going to the bathroom or changing a diaper and before preparing or eating food. Teach your children to do the same.
- Keep infected children away from other children and from the elderly, and follow your doctor's advice about returning to school or day care.



Visit our website at: <http://publichealth.eWashtenaw.org>

Or the Centers for Disease Control & Prevention at: www.cdc.gov

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