

***E. coli* O157:H7 (*E. coli* infection)**

What is *E. coli* O157:H7?

E. coli are bacteria (germs) that normally live in the intestines of humans and animals. One particular type of *E. coli* called O157:H7 can cause severe diarrhea and lead to kidney damage. Some people, particularly children under 5 years, develop a complication called hemolytic uremic syndrome (HUS) which often affects the kidneys.

What are the symptoms?

Symptoms normally begin 1 to 10 days (average 3 – 4 days) after becoming infected and may include:

- Diarrhea (can be severe and/or bloody)
- Vomiting
- Stomach cramps
- Mild fever
- Fatigue

Some infected people have no symptoms at all but can still spread the infection to others.

How is it spread?

- Eating raw or undercooked ground beef and other meats.
- Consuming raw milk or milk products.
- Eating contaminated fruits and vegetables.
- Contact with an infected animal and/or its stool.
- When hands, food, water or objects (toys, etc.) become contaminated with infected stool and then gets into someone's mouth.
- Swallowing contaminated water (e.g. lakes, rivers, springs, streams, ponds, swimming pools, hot tubs).
- Not washing hands after using the bathroom, changing diapers, or having contact with animals.

Who gets *E. coli*?

Anyone can get *E. coli*. Those who travel internationally are more likely to develop infection. Infants, young children, the elderly, and those immunocompromised are at greater risk to develop serious complications.

What should I do if I have symptoms?

- Contact your health care provider.

How is *E. coli* diagnosed?

- By testing a stool sample.

How is *E. coli* treated?

- Most people who have healthy immune systems will recover without treatment.
- Antidiarrheal medications such as Imodium are not recommended.

How can I prevent the spread of *E. coli*?

- Wash your hands with warm, soapy water for 20 seconds:
 - After using the bathroom or changing diapers.
 - After contact with animals or their environments (petting zoos, farms, fairs).
 - Before eating or preparing foods.
 - After handling raw meat.
- Assist young children with hand washing.
- Properly dispose of dirty diapers.
- Cook ground beef to 160^{oF}.
- Wash and/or peel raw fruits and vegetables.
- Do not consume raw milk, milk products, or unpasteurized juices.
- Prevent cross contamination in the kitchen:
 - Use separate cutting boards for meats and other foods.
 - Clean and sanitize cutting boards, counter tops, and utensils.
- Do not prepare food for others.
- Do not swallow water when swimming.
- Do not swim while you have diarrhea and for two week after your diarrhea stops.
- Do not send your child to daycare or preschool if he/she has diarrhea.
- Do not go to work if you are a health care worker, food handler, or day care worker. Please notify the health department of your illness.

For further information visit:

- www.foodsafety.gov
- <http://www.cdc.gov/ecoli/>

Report *E. coli* cases to Saint Louis County Department of Health by calling 314 615 1630