



# E. coli

## What is E. coli?

E. coli are bacteria that many animals and humans have in their intestines. Some types of E. coli are not harmful but others like E. coli O157:H7 can cause serious illnesses.

## How can you get sick?

People can get E. coli infection from eating:

- Undercooked or improperly stored animal meat sources like: beef, ham, turkey, sandwich meats, or cheese
- Unpasteurized apple cider and milk
- Unwashed, raw vegetables
- Contaminated water

Once someone has eaten contaminated food, they can pass the infection to another person from hand to mouth contact. Poor hand washing and improper food handling can lead to the spread of the illness. In adults the bacteria is contagious for one week or less. In one third of children it is contagious for three weeks.

E. coli does not survive on countertops, tables, or in the air, and it is not spread through casual contact, or by coughing or kissing.

## What are the symptoms?

Symptoms can occur 2 to 10 days after exposure to the E. coli bacteria. Common symptoms include:

- Diarrhea (sometimes bloody)
- Severe stomach cramps
- Nausea & vomiting
- Fever (occasionally)

A serious complication could develop called, Hemolytic Uremic Syndrome (HUS). Someone with HUS may not urinate as much and as often as they should.

They may also have swelling in the face, hands and feet, paleness of the skin, irritability and fatigue (tired). HUS can lead to kidney failure. Continue to watch for signs of HUS, even if diarrhea has stopped. If you develop these symptoms, seek immediate medical attention.

## What treatment is available?

Usually E. coli passes through the intestines naturally in 5 to 10 days. Antibiotics and anti-diarrhea medications are not recommended because they can increase the risk of complications.

## How can E. coli infections be prevented?

1. Cook meat thoroughly, until juices run clear & the meat is not pink.
2. Be sure the milk and apple cider you drink is pasteurized.
3. Wash all fruits and vegetables before eating.
4. Wash hands often and thoroughly with warm water and soap. It is very important to wash hands before preparing food or eating, and after using the toilet, handling pets or changing diapers.
5. Clean and sanitize countertops and utensils after preparing raw meats and poultry.
6. Only drink water from a safe water supply. Do not drink from open streams or lakes. Do not prepare or handle food if you have diarrhea.

**Note:** *Infants, children, food handlers and healthcare workers should remain at home until they have been diarrhea free for at least 24 hours. During a community outbreak people may be asked to stay home longer.*

### Sources:

1. Heymann D.L. (Ed.). (2004). *Control of Communicable Diseases Manual*, (18<sup>th</sup> ed.). Washington, DC: American Public Health Association
2. Centers for Disease Control & Prevention. *Escherichia coli O157:H7*. Retrieved June 2005, from [http://www.cdc.gov/ncidod/dbmd/diseaseinfo/escherichiacoli\\_g.htm](http://www.cdc.gov/ncidod/dbmd/diseaseinfo/escherichiacoli_g.htm)  
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