

E.coli FACTSHEET

What is E. coli 0157:H7 infection?

E. coli 0157:H7 is a type of E. coli bacteria that causes a serious infection involving the gastrointestinal tract. E. coli are bacteria found in the digestive tracts of humans and many animals. Usually, these bacteria are harmless and may even be beneficial. Not all the E. coli bacteria are alike and, a few may produce infection, such as E. coli 0157:H7.

Who gets E. coli 0157:H7 infection?

Anyone can get E. coli 0157:H7 infection. Young children and the elderly are most often affected by complications of the infection.

What are the symptoms of E. coli 0157:H7 infection?

The symptoms of E. coli 0157:H7 include severe bloody diarrhea and abdominal pain. Sometimes the infection causes non-bloody diarrhea. Usually, little or no fever is present. In some cases, there are no symptoms at all.

How is E. coli 0157:H7 infection spread?

The bacteria that cause this disease can be spread in several ways:

- Eating meat, especially ground beef that is undercooked. The contaminated meat looks and smells normal.
- Consumption of sprouts, lettuce, salami, unpasteurized milk and juice contaminated with the bacteria.
- Swimming in or drinking sewerage contaminated water.
- Direct per-to-person spread through the feces/poop of an infected individual. This occurs when hygiene and hand washing practices are inadequate.
- Handling animals or pets that are contaminated with these bacteria.

Is a person with E. coli 0157:H7 infection contagious?

Yes, the person is contagious if these bacteria can be found in their stool. If you are infected with this disease, you can spread it to others if you are not washing your hands properly.

How is E. coli 0157:H7 infection treated?

Most persons recover from this infection without antibiotics or other specific treatment. Anti-diarrheal drugs should be avoided.

Should a person with E. coli 0157:H7 infection be excluded from work or school?

People with active diarrhea who are unable to control

their bowel movements (infants, young children, certain handicapped individuals, etc.) should be excluded from settings such as day care or group activities where they may present a risk to others. Most infected people may return to work or school when their stools become formed provided that they carefully wash their hands after using the bathroom. Food handlers, health-care providers, and children in day care must obtain approval of the DC Department of Health before returning to work or school.

Can E. coli 0157:H7 infection be prevented?

The following steps will decrease your risk of contracting or spreading this infection:

- Cook all ground beef and hamburger thoroughly to a temperature of 160 degrees Fahrenheit.
- If you are served an undercooked hamburger or other ground beef product in a restaurant, send it back for additional cooking. Request that the item be placed on a new bun and a clean plate.
- Avoid spreading harmful bacteria in the kitchen by keeping raw meat separate from ready-to-eat foods, washing hands, counters, and utensils with hot soapy water after they touch raw meat, never place cooked meat on an unwashed plate used to hold raw meat, wash meat thermometer in between tests of meat that require further cooking.
- Wash fruits and vegetables thoroughly, especially those that will not be cooked.
- Drink or eat only pasteurized products.
- Drink only municipal water that has been treated.
- Avoid swallowing or drinking lake or pool water while swimming.
- Frequent hand washing with soap especially before and after preparing food or beverages, after using the bathroom, and after changing diapers.
- Monitoring children's hand washing before meals and after using the bathroom.
- Dispose of soiled diapers properly
- Persons with diarrheal illness should not prepare food for others.
- Wash your hands thoroughly after handling or petting any animals.

Want more information?

Information about E. coli and other related health topics can be found at the website www.cdc.gov. The DC Department of Health promotes the health and safety of the District residents. For additional information, please visit www.dchealth.dc.gov or call (202) 442- 9021.