

PUBLIC HEALTH FACT SHEET



Department of Health & Human Services

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E. coli 0157:H7

What is E. coli 0157:H7?

Escherichia coli (E. coli) 0157:H7 is bacteria that can cause foodborne illness.

How is it spread?

The most common way it is spread is by eating under cooked ground meat, such as hamburgers and contaminated raw vegetables. Person to person contact with people who don't wash their hands after going to the bathroom or changing diapers is another way the disease is spread. You can also get E-coli from:

- drinking raw milk (unpasteurized)
- swimming in or drinking contaminated water
- eating poorly washed contaminated raw fruits and/or vegetables.

What are the symptoms?

- diarrhea - mild to severe, and may be bloody
- stomach cramps

How long after exposure do symptoms first begin?

Symptoms occur in three to eight days, but usually three to four days.

How long is a person contagious?

Adults are contagious usually one week or less and children up to 3 weeks.

Are there complications?

Children under five years old and the elderly may develop hemolytic uremic syndrome – red blood cells are destroyed and the kidneys fail.

Is there a treatment for E. coli 0157:H7?

See your doctor immediately if bloody diarrhea occurs. Antibiotics are generally not used.

How can E. coli 0157:H7 disease be prevented?

- The disease can be prevented by thoroughly cooking all ground meat, including hamburger. Make sure that the cooked meat is gray or brown throughout, juices run clear and the inside is hot.
- Drink only pasteurized milk and milk products.
- Thoroughly wash raw fruits and vegetables before eating them. This includes washing skins and rinds before peeling or cutting them.
- Wash your hands with soap carefully and often, particularly before handling food, after using the bathrooms or changing diapers, and whenever they are dirty.
- Drink only water known to be safe. Municipal water treated with chlorine is generally safe.

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HAND WASHING INSTRUCTIONS:

- use soap and running water
- rub your hands vigorously for 20 seconds
- wash all surfaces, including:
 - backs of hands
 - wrists
 - between fingers
 - under fingernails
- rinse well
- dry hands with a paper towel
- turn off the water using a paper towel instead of bare hands

For more information on Ecoli, call (248) 858-1406 or toll free 1 (800) 848-5533.

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