

E. coli Bacteria

What is E. coli?

E. coli are bacteria that are commonly found in the intestines of humans and animals. There are different types of E. coli; some not harmful to people and some which cause serious illness such as E. coli O157: H7.

How can you get sick from the harmful type of E. coli?

- E. coli infections can be spread by many food sources such as undercooked ground beef, unpasteurized apple cider or milk, ham, turkey, roast beef, sandwich meats, raw vegetables, cheese and contaminated water.
- Once someone has consumed contaminated food or water, this infection can be passed from person to person by hand to mouth contact or through the fecal-oral route.
- E. coli does not survive in the air, on surfaces like tables or counters and is not spread by coughing, kissing or normal, everyday interactions with friends and neighbours.
- Poor hand washing and improper food handling are factors that lead to the spread of this illness. Hands should be washed with soap and water.

What are the symptoms of infection?

Stomach cramps, diarrhea (possibly bloody), fever (infrequent), nausea, vomiting. If you or a family member have any of the symptoms, it is important to wash your hands, after going to the bathroom, and before and after preparing food for others. If possible, have someone who has not been infected prepare the meals.

How do you prevent E. coli infections?

- Cook ground beef thoroughly to an internal temperature of 71°C (160°F) or until the juices run clear and the meat is no longer pink. It is best to use a probing thermometer to confirm.
- Drink only pasteurized apple cider and milk. Never let youngsters sample milk produced directly from the animal.
- Wash all fruits and vegetables before eating even if they appear clean
- Make sure hands are washed with soap and water for at least 15 seconds after using the bathroom, handling diapers, pets, livestock and before preparing food.
- Clean and sanitize counter tops and utensils after these have been in contact with raw meats and poultry.
- Use separate work surfaces, cutting boards and utensils for preparing raw and cooked foods.
- Keep cold foods at 4°C (40°F) or lower. Keep hot foods at 60°C (140°F) or higher.
- Drink water from a supply intended for human consumption. Have your well tested regularly.
- Do not drink untreated surface water from open streams, lakes or springs.
- If ill with diarrhea, avoid preparing or handling food that others will be eating. If employed as a food handler or health care provider, report symptoms to your manager.

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What should I do if symptoms persist?

Anyone who shows symptoms of E. coli should see their physician immediately.

Under 10% of individuals with E. coli infection will develop Hemolytic Uremic Syndrome (HUS). HUS is a serious complication of E. coli infection that may lead to kidney failure. Symptoms of HUS may include a decrease in the amount of urine produced, swelling in the face, hands, and feet, paleness of the skin, irritability and fatigue. Young children (especially under 5 years of age) and the elderly are most at risk for HUS. It is important to watch for the signs of HUS even after diarrhea has stopped. Anyone with these symptoms should see their physician immediately.

This fact sheet provides basic information only. It must not take the place of medical advice, diagnosis or treatment. Always talk to a health care professional about any health concerns.

Source: Ontario Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care, Public Health Division.

**For further information contact the Infectious Disease Program at 625-8318
or toll free 1-888-294-6630, ext. 8318.**