

E. coli 0157:H7 Infection

What is E. coli Infection?

There are many types of E. coli bacteria (germ) that are related to foodborne illnesses. Most E. coli types are harmless and live in the intestines of healthy people and animals.

E. coli 0157:H7 can cause severe illness because it makes a toxin called Shiga toxin. The bacteria that make these toxins are called “Shiga toxin-producing E. coli,” or STEC for short.

Who Usually Gets an E. coli Infection?

- People with higher chances for foodborne illness are:
 - pregnant people
 - newborns and children
 - older adults
 - people with weak immune systems (such as people with cancer, diabetes, HIV or AIDS).
- Anyone who eats food or drinks water contaminated with the E. coli germ, or who has contact with infected people or animals, can become infected.

You can get the infection more than once.

How is an E. coli Infection Spread?

The infection is spread by:

- eating raw or undercooked beef (such as rare steak or hamburgers)
- drinking unpasteurized (raw) milk or milk products
- drinking unpasteurized fruit juices, especially apple juice or apple cider

- eating soft cheeses made from raw (unpasteurized) milk
- having contact with stool (poop) from an infected person or animal.

What are the Symptoms of an E. coli Infection?

- Symptoms of E. coli 0157:H7 infections differ for each person. They often include severe stomach cramps, diarrhea (often bloody) and vomiting.
- Some people may have a low-grade fever (less than 101 F).
- Some infections are mild, but others are severe or even life-threatening.
- Most people with E. coli 0157:H7 infections start feeling sick 3 to 4 days after eating or drinking something that had the bacteria. Sickness can start in as little as 1 day or up to 10 days.

When Should You Call Your Health Care Provider?

Call your health care provider if you have any of these:

- have diarrhea that lasts for more than 3 days or diarrhea with a fever higher than 102 F
- have blood in your stool
- vomit (throw up) so much that you cannot keep liquids down and pass very little urine.

(over)

What are the Side Effects of an E. coli Infection?

A condition that may cause the kidneys to stop working and blood disorders to develop may occur. This is called hemolytic-uremic syndrome. It starts about 7 days after the first symptoms appear and requires a hospital stay. Most people recover in a few weeks.

Children younger than age 5 and elderly people are more at risk of developing this condition.

Symptoms include urinating less, feeling very tired (fatigue), and losing the pink color in your cheeks and inside the lower eyelids.

Most people recover in a few weeks.

How is an E. coli Infection Found?

A test (culture) of your stool will show if you have an infection.

How is an E. coli Infection Treated?

Most people recover within 5 to 7 days without antibiotics or other specific treatment. It is very important to drink lots of liquids so your body does not become dehydrated (dried out).

How Long can the E. coli Germ be Spread?

Adults can usually spread the germ for about one week. Children may carry the germ in their stools for up to 3 weeks.

How can You Prevent the Spread of an E. coli Infection?

To prevent the spread of E. coli, **do not:**

- eat raw or undercooked beef, such as rare steak or hamburgers
- drink unpasteurized (raw) milk or milk products
- drink unpasteurized fruit juices, especially apple juice or apple cider
- store meat near or above produce in your refrigerator. (This can help reduce the risk of raw meat leaking onto other foods.)

To prevent the spread of E. coli, **do:**

- wash your hands with plenty of soap and water after using the bathroom, after changing a diaper and before and after preparing food (Parents should stress proper handwashing habits to their children.)
- wash your hands after contact with animals and manure used for farming or gardening
- wash counters, cutting boards and utensils after they touch raw meat.

How Long Should Infected People Stay Home From Work or School?

Infected people with diarrhea who can't control it may need to be kept home or be restricted until the diarrhea becomes better. This is often the case with children in daycare centers and adults in nursing homes.

Your health care provider can tell you when it's OK to return to work or school.

Information adapted from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.