

***E. coli* O157: H7 FACT SHEET**

What is *Escherichia coli* O157:H7?

E. coli is one of hundreds of types of the bacteria *Escherichia coli*. Although most types are harmless and live in the intestines of healthy humans and animals, this type produces a powerful poison and can cause severe illness.

What are the symptoms of *E. coli*?

Infection with *E. coli* O157:H7 often causes severe bloody diarrhea and stomach cramps. Symptoms may last up to 10 days. Some persons have no symptoms. Children under 5 years of age and the elderly are more at risk for complications due to infection with *E. coli*. One of these complications is hemolytic uremic syndrome (HUS). This leads to kidney failure. HUS happens in about 1 in 20 infections.

How is *E. coli* spread?

These bacteria can be found on cattle farms and can live in the intestines of healthy cattle. Meat can become contaminated during slaughter. Raw milk, unpasteurized, is a possible source of infection. Other known sources of the bacteria are sprouts, lettuce, salami, unpasteurized milk and juice, and swimming in or drinking sewage-contaminated water. Bacteria in the stools of infected persons can be passed from one person to another if handwashing is inadequate.

Is there any treatment for this illness?

Most persons recover without specific treatment in 5-10 days. Although, some people with *E. coli* infection will need treatment.

What can be done to prevent infection with *E. coli* O157:H7?

You, the consumer, must be aware that all ground beef is potentially contaminated with bacteria. Cook all ground beef and hamburger thoroughly. Ground beef should be cooked to 160 degrees F. Keep raw meat separate from ready-to-eat-foods. Wash hands, counters and utensils with hot soapy water after they touch raw meat. Never place cooked hamburgers or ground beef on the unwashed plate that held raw patties. Drink only pasteurized milk, juice, or cider. Avoid swallowing lake or pool water while swimming. Anyone with a diarrhea illness should avoid swimming in public pools or lakes, sharing baths with others and preparing food for others. Children in diapers should not go in public pools. Petting zoos are a possible source for coming in contact with *E. coli*. Remember to wash hands well with plenty of soap and water after visiting, feeding and petting the animals.

Visit the US Department of Agriculture's Food Safety and Inspection Service website at: <http://www.fsis.usda.gov> for more information about reducing your risk of foodborne illness.

Visit the U.S. Department of Agriculture web site at: <http://www.fsis.usda.gov/OA/topics/gb.htm> for more information on cooking ground beef.

Questions?

For more information please contact Contra Costa Public Health at 925-313-6740 and visit our website at <http://cchealth.org/ecoli/>