

# Fact Sheet: *E.coli*

## What is *E.coli*?

*E. coli* (*Escherichia coli*) are bacteria that normally live in the intestines of animals and humans. There are many strains of *E. coli* bacteria. Most are harmless and play an important part of a healthy human intestinal tract. However, one particular strain, *E. coli* O157:H7, may cause serious illness in people by making a toxin called Shiga toxin.

## Signs and Symptoms

- Stomach cramps
- Diarrhea that may contain blood
- Vomiting
- Severe infection may lead to kidney problems

Symptoms appear from 1 to 10 days after exposure, with an average of 3 to 4 days. An adult infected with *E. coli* is contagious for approximately 7 days. However, children may be contagious for up to 3 weeks.

**If you are a food service worker, a health care worker, or a childcare worker, report your illness to your supervisor and do not work until your medical provider says it is OK.**

**Be Food Safe.  
Separate.  
Do NOT Cross  
Contaminate!**

## How is it spread?

- *E. coli* can be spread to people through consuming raw or undercooked beef.
- It can also be spread by consuming contaminated water or foods such as melons, lettuce, spinach, apple cider, coleslaw, alfalfa sprouts, or unpasteurized milk.
- Infected individuals may spread the illness to others by not washing their hands well after a bowel movement or contact with animals.
- *E. coli* can also spread from contaminated drinking or recreational water.

## Treatment

- If you think you have been exposed, call your health care provider immediately for a stool sample test and treatment recommendations.
- Drink plenty of fluids to prevent dehydration.

## Prevention

- Wash all fruits and vegetables thoroughly before eating
- Fully cook ground beef products to **160 degrees Fahrenheit**
- Wash hands after handling ground beef and wash all utensils that have been exposed to the raw meat.
- Reduce cross contamination by using separate cutting boards for raw meat and vegetables. Disinfect cutting boards.
- Keep thawing and uneaten cooked foods in the refrigerator
- Do not consume raw milk, raw milk products, or any other unpasteurized product
- Wash your hands after going to the bathroom, changing a diaper, working with animals and before preparing or eating food

This fact sheet is for informational purposes and is not meant to be used for self-diagnosis or as a substitute for consultation with a health care professional. For more information about communicable disease, speak to your health care provider or call the Ingham County Health Department at (517)-887-4308.

Visit our website at <http://hd.ingham.org>

or the Centers for Disease Control & Prevention at: [www.cdc.gov](http://www.cdc.gov)  
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