



Sedgwick County...
working for you

E coli

What is E. coli?

Escherichia coli is a common kind of bacteria that lives in the intestines of animals and people. There are many strains of E. coli, most of which are harmless. However, E. coli O157:H7 produces a powerful poison and is the leading cause of food borne illness.

What are the symptoms of E. coli O157:H7?

E. coli O157:H7 often causes severe bloody diarrhea and abdominal cramps. Sometimes the infection causes non-bloody diarrhea or no symptoms. Usually little or no fever occurs.

How soon do symptoms appear after infection occurs?

People generally become ill 2-8 days after being exposed to the bacteria, with symptoms appearing on average 3-4 days from exposure.

How is E coli spread?

E. coli O157:H7 is spread by eating undercooked meat. Raw vegetables, sprouts, and fruits that have been grown or washed in dirty water can carry E. coli O157:H7. Swimming in or drinking sewage-contaminated water is an additional source of infection. It is also spread by people who have not washed their hands after going to the restroom.

How is E. coli treated?

Most people recover without specific treatment within 5 to 10 days. Antibiotics should not be used to treat infection and antidiarrheal agents should be avoided, unless indicated by your doctor. In some persons, particularly children under the age of five and the elderly, the infection can also cause a serious complication in which the red blood cells are destroyed and the kidneys fail. This generally results in hospitalization of the individual.

How can you prevent E. coli?

- Cook ground beef and hamburger thoroughly until there is no pink in the middle and juices run clear. If a restaurant serves you an under-cooked hamburger, send it back for more cooking. Ask for a new bun and a clean plate.
- Keep raw meat separate from ready-to-eat foods. Wash hands, counters and utensils with hot soapy water after they touch raw meat.
- Only drink milk, juice or cider that has been pasteurized.
- Wash fruits and vegetables under running water, especially those that will not be cooked. Remove the outer leaves of leafy vegetables.
- Drink safe water like municipal water that has been treated with chlorine, water from wells that have been tested or bottled water.
- Avoid swallowing lake or pool water while swimming.
- Wash hands thoroughly after using the restroom or changing diapers.
- Anyone with a diarrhea should avoid swimming in public places, sharing baths with and preparing food for others.

For more information

Visit the Sedgwick County
Health Department Web page at
www.sedgwickcounty.org
or call 660-7392.