



ESCHERICHIA COLI (E.COLI) FACT SHEET

WHAT IS E.COLI?

E. coli are a large and diverse group of bacteria. Although most strains of E. coli are harmless, others can make people sick. People of any age can become infected with E. coli, but groups at highest risk for severe illness include: children younger than 5, adults older than 65, and people with weakened immune systems.

HOW DO YOU GET E.COLI?

People can get E.Coli by consuming contaminated water or food and through contact with animals or persons (via the fecal-oral route). Sources may include raw or undercooked beef products, raw or unpasteurized items (milk, cheese, yogurt, etc.), produce (lettuce, sprouts, spinach), and various water sources (potable, well, and recreational water).

SYMPTOMS

Symptoms vary for each person but often include severe stomach cramps, diarrhea (often bloody), fever, and vomiting. Symptoms usually begin 3 to 4 days after exposure, but may range from 1 to 9 days. Most people get better within 5 to 7 days. Approximately 5–10% of people with STEC O157 infection develop a potentially life-threatening complication known as hemolytic uremic syndrome (HUS), a type of kidney failure.

TREATMENT

Supportive therapy, such as hydration, is important. Antibiotics are not recommended to treat this infection. Taking antibiotics may increase the risk of Hemolytic Uremic Syndrome (HUS). Antidiarrheal agents may also increase that risk. Discuss treatment options with your doctor.

PREVENTION

- Wash your hands thoroughly after using the bathroom or changing diaper, before preparing or eating food, and after contact with animals or their environments (at farms, petting zoos, fairs, even your own backyard)
- Cook meats thoroughly. Ground beef should be cooked to a temperature of at least 160°F/70°C. It's best to use a thermometer, as color is not a very reliable indicator
- Avoid raw milk, unpasteurized dairy products, and unpasteurized juices
- Avoid swallowing water when swimming or playing in lakes, ponds, streams, swimming pools
- Prevent cross contamination in food preparation areas by thoroughly washing hands, counters, cutting boards, and utensils after they touch raw meat
- Any person infected with E.Coli who attends or works at a child care center or is employed in a sensitive occupation (direct food handling or direct patient care) should be excluded.

DPHD EFFORTS:

The Delaware Public Health District (DPHD) routinely inspects restaurants, grocery stores, and other places where food is sold. In addition, we provide training to food service workers and the public regarding proper food handling practices. Public Swimming Pools and Spas are inspected by our sanitarians and regulated by Ohio Administrative Code (OAC) 3701-31. Reports of suspected and confirmed cases of disease are made to the DPHD. The DPHD investigates potential sources of illness, conducts surveillance for the spread of illness, and engages in community outreach and education.