

# FACT SHEET

# Escherichia coli (E. coli)

## What is E. coli?

*Escherichia coli* (*E. coli*) bacteria can be found in the environment, foods, and the intestines of people and animals. Most *E. coli* are harmless, and some are in fact important to a healthy human intestinal tract. However, some *E. coli* are harmful and cause illness.

## How is it spread?

The type of *E. coli* that can cause diarrheal illness can be transmitted through contaminated food or water or through contact with contaminated people or animals. It is most commonly transmitted via undercooked meat, unpasteurized milk, contaminated apple cider, or on foods that have been cross-contaminated with these foods. Transmission also occurs after contact with animals, for example farm animals or animals at a petting zoo.

Symptoms usually begin 1-10 days after exposure. An infected person can be contagious to others for as long as 3 weeks.

## What are the symptoms?

- Watery or bloody diarrhea
- Stomach cramping and pain
- Nausea and vomiting
- Dehydration
- Weight loss
- Fever

*This fact sheet is for informational purposes only and is not intended for self-diagnosis or as a substitute for consultation with a health care provider. For more information contact your health care provider or visit the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention at [www.cdc.gov](http://www.cdc.gov).*

## How can it be prevented?

- Practice good hand washing after using the bathroom and before and during food preparation.
- Cook all meat well done.
- Practice safe food preparation and food storage.
- Use a separate cutting board and utensils for meat than you do other foods.
- Thoroughly wash all fruits and vegetables.
- Refrigerate uneaten cooked foods immediately to prevent bacterial growth.
- Avoid raw milk and other unpasteurized dairy products and unpasteurized juices.
- Don't swallow water when swimming.

## How is it treated?

*E. Coli* infection with diarrheal illness generally resolves without treatment and antibiotics are not usually indicated. Fluid replacement is essential to avoid dehydration, particularly in children.

If you are a food handler, or work at or attend a day care, you should not work until symptoms resolve. You may be asked to submit a stool specimen for testing prior to returning.

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