

FACT SHEET

Escherichia coli O157:H7

(*E. coli* O157:H7)

What is *E. coli* O157:H7?

E. coli O157:H7 is a type of bacteria that can cause bloody diarrhea. It is usually seen in the summer. The term "O157:H7" means a certain type of *E. coli*. Most types of *E. coli* are harmless and live in the gut but *E. coli* O157:H7 can cause you to be sick.

How is *E. coli* O157:H7 spread?

E. coli O157:H7 is spread by a person eating or drinking food or water that contains stool of infected people or animals. Raw milk, unpasteurized cider or other juices, or poorly cooked meat, especially ground beef, or can also contain the bacteria.

Who gets *E. coli* O157:H7?

Anyone can be infected.

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

The major symptom is diarrhea, which can look like bloody water. Stomach cramps and chills may occur. There is usually no fever. Rarely, the infection can cause the kidneys to stop working, especially in young children.

How soon do symptoms appear?

Symptoms usually start in 3 - 4 days after exposure but can be anywhere from 2 - 8 days.

What Should You Do If You Think You May Be Infected?

Contact your doctor. Do not go to work or school and do not prepare food when diarrhea is present.

Can infection with *E. coli* O157:H7 occur more than once?

Yes

How is infection with *E. coli* O157:H7 prevented?

- Do not fix food for others while having diarrhea.
- Always wash hands thoroughly with soap and water before eating and before and after fixing any food, especially raw meat.
- Wash hands after using the toilet and after changing diapers. (Wash the diapered child's hands also.)
- When caring for someone with diarrhea, wash your hands with plenty of soap and water after cleaning the bathroom, helping the person use the toilet, or changing diapers, soiled clothes or soiled sheets. Be sure to wash their hands also.
- Always refrigerate meat. Never leave raw meat at room temperature.
- Keep food that will be eaten raw, such as fruits and vegetables, from being in contact with food products from animals. (Wash thoroughly, especially those that will not be cooked.)
- Never eat raw meat. If you are served an undercooked hamburger or other ground beef product in a restaurant, send it back for further cooking.
- Cook all ground beef and hamburger thoroughly – to a temperature of 155 degrees F for at least 15 - 16 seconds or until juices run clear and no pink is visible.
- Always wash hands, cutting boards and utensils between fixing raw meat or poultry and other items such as fruits and vegetables.
- Drink only pasteurized milk, juice, or cider.
- Avoid sexual practices that may permit fecal-oral transmission. Latex barrier protection (condoms) should be used to prevent the spread of *E. coli* O157:H7 to sexual partners as well as other pathogens.