



FACT SHEET

E. coli O157:H7

What is it?

Escherichia coli are bacteria that normally live in the intestines of humans and animals. There are many strains of *E. coli* bacteria and most of them are harmless. However, one particular strain, *E. coli* O157: H7 causes serious illness in people.

Symptoms

Symptoms appear 1 to 10 days after exposure, usually 3- 4 days.

- Diarrhea (which often becomes bloody)
- Stomach cramps
- Little or no fever

Potential Complications:

Hemolytic Uremic Syndrome (HUS)

- Hemolytic uremic syndrome, or HUS is a serious complication of *E. coli* O157:H7 infection.
- HUS damages the kidneys and blood vessels.
- Most people with *E. coli* O157:H7 infection don't develop HUS.
- HUS is more common in young children and the elderly who have *E. coli* O157:H7 infection.

How is it spread?

- It is spread from cattle to people from raw or undercooked meat, unpasteurized milk, or contaminated water.
- People can also get infected by consuming raw produce or unpasteurized juice or cider that has been contaminated either by manure in the field or by raw beef or raw beef juices in the kitchen.
- An infected person may spread the illness to others by failing to wash their hands well after a bowel movement.

Diagnosis and Treatment

- *E. coli* O157:H7 is diagnosed by testing a stool sample from an ill person using a special test.

- The diarrhea usually goes away in a few days without treatment. Do not use anti-diarrhea medicines. It is important to drink plenty of fluids to prevent dehydration (fluid loss).
- Antibiotics are not recommended for *E. coli* O157:H7 infection. Taking antibiotics may increase the risk of Hemolytic Uremic Syndrome (HUS).

Prevention

- Cook ground beef and hamburger thoroughly.
- Keep raw meat separate from ready-to-eat foods.
- Wash hands, counters, and utensils with hot soapy water after they touch raw meat.
- Never place cooked hamburgers, ground beef, or other ready-to-eat foods on unwashed plates that held raw patties.
- If you are served pink hamburger in a restaurant, send it back for further cooking.
- Wash fruit and vegetables thoroughly under running water, especially if they will not be cooked.
- Wash hands thoroughly using soap and warm water after handling raw meat, using the bathroom, helping a child in the bathroom, or changing diapers.
- Wash hands thoroughly using soap and warm water before preparing or eating food.
- Teach children how and when to wash their hands.
- Drink only Pasteurized milk, juice and cider.
- Anyone with a diarrhea illness should avoid swimming in public pools or lakes, sharing baths with others, and preparing food for others.

Report all cases to El Paso Department of Public Health by calling 915-771-5810