

# E. coli 0157:H7 DIARRHEA

## PERSONAL HEALTH FACT SHEET

### **What is *E. coli* diarrhea?**

*E. coli* is a common kind of bacteria that lives in the intestines of animals and people. There are many strains of *E. coli*. While most *E. coli* strains are harmless, there is one dangerous strain called *E. coli* 0157:H7. Persons can become infected with *E. coli* 0157:H7 by ingesting food or water contaminated with this bacteria.

### **How is it spread?**

*E. coli* 0157:H7 can be transmitted through any type of food contaminated with this organism. It can be transmitted through contaminated undercooked ground beef, unpasteurized milk and juice, as well as contaminated raw vegetables and fruit. Transmission can occur through drinking water, lakes and swimming pools contaminated with sewage. *E. coli* can be spread by toddlers who are not toilet trained, adults who do not wash their hands thoroughly after changing diapers or going to the toilet, and from an infected person to another if personal hygiene is poor. An adult infected with *E. coli* is contagious for a week while children may be contagious up to 3 weeks.

### **How is it treated?**

*E. coli* 0157:H7 diarrhea generally resolves without treatment, and antibiotics are not usually indicated. Additional fluids may be needed to combat dehydration, especially among children. On rare occasions, hospitalization may be required to combat blood and kidney complications.

### **How can we prevent *E. coli* Diarrhea?**

- Wash hands well with warm, soapy water after using the bathroom, changing diapers, and/or before and during preparation of foods. Teach children to do the same.
- Cook ground beef thoroughly. All of the pink color should be gone before serving.
- Never place cooked meat on the same plate that was used to hold raw meat.
- Have two cutting boards, one for meat and one for other foods.
- Wash and disinfect cutting boards and counters after use. Use an antimicrobial soap or a solution of one tablespoon bleach to one-half cup water.
- Wash all fruits and vegetables thoroughly. Peel if possible or use a stiff brush and wash vigorously.
- Refrigerate uneaten cooked foods immediately to prevent bacterial growth. Heat leftovers thoroughly before serving.
- Drink only pasteurized milk, juice or cider. Drink water only from safe sources. Do not swallow lake or pool water while swimming.
- Infected food handlers, day care attendees or workers should be excluded until symptoms have subsided and stool samples test negative.

### **SYMPTOMS OF *E. coli* DIARRHEA**

- Watery or bloody diarrhea
- Vomiting
- Severe abdominal pain and cramping
- If there is fever, it is usually not high.

Symptoms appear 2-10 days after exposure, usually 3-4 days.

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