

Spotlight On Safety

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E. Coli O157:H7

Escherichia coli (E. coli) are bacteria that normally live in the intestines of humans and animals. There are many strains of E. coli bacteria. Most of them are harmless. However, one particular strain, E. coli O157:H7, may cause serious illness in people. Cattle may be a prime source of infection for people.

What are the symptoms?

- Diarrhea (which often becomes bloody) and stomach cramps
- Slight fever (often no fever)
- Symptoms appear from 1 - 10 days after exposure, usually 2 - 4 days

How does it Spread?

- It can spread from cattle to people through raw or undercooked meat, un-pasteurized milk, or contaminated water, or by foods which were contaminated by raw beef products
- An infected person may spread the illness to others by failure to wash hands well after going to the restroom

Diagnosis & Treatment

- E. coli O157:H7 is diagnosed by examining a stool sample (this requires a special test that is not available in all laboratories - if an E. coli O157:H7 infection is suspected, a health care provider must request a culture for these bacteria so that the stool sample will be sent to a laboratory that can perform the test)
- The diarrhea usually goes away in a few days without treatment; it is important to drink plenty of fluids to prevent dehydration - fluid loss (do not use anti-diarrhea medicines)

Prevention

- Cook all meat, especially ground beef, thoroughly (contaminated meat looks and smells normal- there is no risk from E. coli O157:H7 if the meat is thoroughly cooked)
- Wash hands thoroughly after handling raw hamburger
- Clean all utensils and surfaces after contact with raw meat
- Make certain that cooked meat is grey or brown (not pink) throughout (cook ground beef to 155° F, there should be no bloody juices)
- If you are served pink meat, especially hamburger, in a restaurant, send it back for further cooking
- Drink only pasteurized milk: eat only milk products (for example, cheese) made with pasteurized milk
- Wash hands thoroughly; use soap and warm water (wash after going to the restroom or changing a diaper, and before preparing or eating food)
- Teach children good hygiene habits
- Keep infected children away from other children and the elderly, and follow your health care provider's advice about returning to school or day care

Visit www.ehs.ucr.edu for additional information or call EH&S at 827-5528 if you have any questions.