



Salem/Cumberland County Health Department

E. COLI

(PUBLIC HANDOUT)

What is E. Coli?

E. coli is an illness caused by bacteria. Most infections have come from eating undercooked ground beef.

What are the symptoms of E. Coli?

- Severe bloody diarrhea
- Severe abdominal cramps

Sometimes the infection causes non-bloody diarrhea or no symptoms. Usually little or no fever is present, and illness clears up in 5-10 days.

How does E. Coli spread?

The organism can be found on a small number of cattle farms and can live in the intestines of healthy cattle. Meat can become contaminated during slaughter, and organisms can be thoroughly mixed into beef when it is ground. Bacteria present on the cow's udders or on equipment may get into raw milk.

Eating meat, especially ground beef, which has not been cooked sufficiently to kill E. Coli can cause infection. Contaminated meat looks and smells normal.



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Among other known sources of infection are consumption of: sprouts, lettuce, salami, unpasteurized milk and juice, and swimming in or drinking sewage-contaminated water.

How can E. Coli be treated?

Most people recover without antibiotics or other treatment in 5-10 days.

What are the long-term consequences of the infection?

People who only have diarrhea usually recover completely. About one-third of those with hemolytic uremic syndrome, a life-threatening condition, have abdominal kidney function many years later, and a few require long-term dialysis. Another 8% of people with hemolytic uremic syndrome have other lifelong complications, such as high blood pressure, seizures, blindness, paralysis, and other effects of having part of their bowel removed.

How can E. Coli be prevented?

Cook all ground beef and hamburger thoroughly, drink only pasteurized drinks, wash fruits and vegetables



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thoroughly, avoid swallowing lake or pool water while swimming, and wash hands thoroughly.