



E. Coli (Public Handout)

What is E. Coli?

E. Coli is a bacteria that normally lives in the intestines of healthy people and animals, primarily cattle. Most strains of this bacteria are harmless.

What are the symptoms of E. Coli?

Some individuals have no symptoms. Others may have mild to severe diarrhea, which may contain blood. Abdominal cramps, nausea and vomiting may occur. Usually there is little or no fever. Most people get better within 5–7 days. Some infections are very mild, but others are severe or even life-threatening.

How soon do symptoms develop?

Symptoms of illness usually appear about 3 days after swallowing the bacteria, but can range from 1 to 8 days.

Who gets E. Coli infections?

Anyone can become infected with *E. coli*. The elderly and children under 5 years of age are at greatest risk of developing a serious illness from *E. coli* infection.

How does E. Coli spread?

A person becomes infected with *E. coli* by swallowing the bacteria. This can occur when an individual eats food which has become contaminated with *E. coli*, most frequently undercooked ground beef and raw milk. Transmission also can occur directly from person-to-person in families, child care centers and custodial institutions. Outbreaks have also been traced to contaminated water.

How long is a person able to spread E. Coli to others?

An infected person is capable of transmitting *E. coli* infection to others as long as the *E. coli* bacteria are being passed in his/her stool, usually lasting no more than one week, but can last as long as 3 weeks in one third of children.

How can E. Coli be treated?

Most individuals who become ill with *E. coli* infection recover on their own within a week. Some however, may require hospitalization to administer IV fluids to prevent dehydration. Antibiotics may be prescribed by a physician to treat severe cases of illness.

How can E. Coli be prevented?

Cook all ground beef and hamburger thoroughly, drink only pasteurized drinks, wash fruits and vegetables thoroughly, avoid swallowing lake or pool water while swimming, and wash hands thoroughly.

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Should an infected person go to work or school?

Most infected persons may return to work or school when they no longer have diarrhea and fever. Since the *E. coli* bacteria may continue to be passed in their stool for several weeks, they must remember to carefully wash their hands with soap and water after every bathroom visit.

For more information:

Additional infection information can be found on New Jersey Department of Health and Senior Services, Communicable Disease Service website:

http://www.state.nj.us/health/cd/f_ecoli.htm

Centers for Disease & Control Prevention (CDC) website:

http://www.cdc.gov/nczved/dfbmd/disease_listing/stec_gi.html