



QUICK FACTS ABOUT....

E.coli O157:H7

What is *E.coli* O157:H7?

E.coli is a bacterium that lives in the gut (intestines) of most warm-blooded animals, including humans. There are hundreds of strains of *E.coli*, and most are harmless. However, *E.coli* O157:H7 is one strain that lives in the gut of healthy cattle that can cause severe illness in humans.

What are the symptoms of *E.coli* infection O157:H7?

Infection often causes severe bloody diarrhea and stomach cramping with little or no fever. Symptoms usually begin 2 to 5 days after exposure and lasts for approximately 5 to 10 days. Some people may only have mild diarrhea without blood OR may have no symptoms at all.

Rarely, people infected with *E.coli* O157:H7 can develop a condition called hemolytic uremic syndrome or "HUS". This condition is very serious and can lead to kidney failure and death. Children under 5 and the elderly are more likely to develop this condition.

How is *E.coli* O157:H7 spread?

People can be infected with *E.coli* by:

- eating undercooked beef products, particularly ground beef;
- drinking unpasteurized milk and fruit juices, including apple cider;
- eating unwashed raw fruits and vegetables; and
- from swimming in or drinking water that has been contaminated with animal or human waste.

An infected person can pass the bacteria in their stool for up to 2 weeks after their symptoms have stopped. These people can transmit the bacteria to others if they do not wash their hands well after using the toilet. Childcare centers are at risk for outbreaks because of the high number of kids who are not toilet-trained. Family members and playmates of these children are also at risk of infection.

How is *E.coli* O157:H7 infection treated?

Most people recover without medical treatment, but anyone with bloody diarrhea (especially young children) should contact their doctor. The use of antibiotics or over-the-counter anti-diarrheal agents is not recommended. Serious infections that affect the kidneys will require hospitalization and extensive medical care.

How can *E.coli* O157:H7 infection be prevented?

- Always wash hands with soap and water:
 - after using the bathroom
 - after changing diapers
 - after cleaning the toilet
 - after handling soiled towels or linens
 - before eating
- Drink only pasteurized milk products and fruit juices, including apple cider.
- Eat only fruits and vegetables that have been washed well.
- Food Preparation:
 - Use a separate cutting board to prepare raw meats.
 - Cook all ground meat thoroughly (particularly ground beef). Ground beef should be cooked to at least 160°F. If the temperature cannot be checked, cook ground beef until the juices run clear, and the inside is gray or brown throughout (not pink).
 - Use a clean plate for cooked meat. Never return cooked meat back to the same plate used for raw meat.
 - If you are served an undercooked hamburger in a restaurant, send it back for further cooking.
 - Marinade or BBQ sauce used on raw meat should not be used on cooked meat.

References:

[Centers for Disease Control and Prevention](#)
[Indiana State Department of Health](#)