

***E. coli*0157:H7 ***

What is *E. coli* 0157:H7?

E. coli are bacteria that normally live in the intestines of humans and animals. There are many strains of *E. coli* bacteria and most of them are harmless. However, one particular strain, *E. coli* O157:H7, may cause serious illness in some individuals.

How is it spread?

E. coli 0157:H7 is transmitted through fecal-oral route. The bacteria live in the gut of healthy cattle, deer, goats, and sheep. It can spread to people through raw or undercooked meat, or unpasteurized milk or juice. Other food items may be contaminated either by manure in the field or by raw beef or raw beef juices in the kitchen. Sick individuals, that do not properly wash their hands after using the restroom or changing diapers, may transfer fecal material and the bacteria to food or objects and infect others.

What are the signs and symptoms?

The most common symptoms are severe stomach cramps and diarrhea (which often becomes bloody), sometimes vomiting but little or no fever. Dehydration, especially among infants and the elderly, may be severe. Hemolytic Uremic Syndrome (HUS) is a serious complication of *E. coli* 0157:H7 infection which starts about one (1) week after the onset of the diarrhea. HUS damages kidneys and blood vessels. Most people do not develop HUS; however, young children and the elderly are at greater risk of developing HUS. Antibiotics are **NOT** recommended to treat this infection.

What is the incubation period and how long is it communicable?

The incubation period ranges from two (2) to ten (10) days with a median of three (3) to four (4) days. The pathogen may be transmitted for one (1) week in adults to three (3) for children. Prolong carrier state (having the bacteria in one's gut without any symptoms) is uncommon.

How can *E. coli* 0157:H7 be prevented?

The best prevention is to wash your hands vigorously with soap and water especially:

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| After: | Toilet visits | Cleaning up vomitus or diarrhea |
| | Handling diapers (use glove) | Handling soiled clothes or linens |
| | Contact with a symptomatic person | |
| Before: | Eating, preparing food | |

This disease can also be prevented by proper disposal of soiled diapers, human waste, and prevention of food and beverage contamination. It is recommended to use only pasteurized milk and dairy products, and heat beef to an internal temperature of 155°F for at least 15-16 seconds. Kitchen counters and cutting boards should be sanitized after use.

It is recommended to use spray bottles to apply the disinfectant (1 part bleach to 9 part of cool water to be prepared daily) to contaminated surfaces such as toilets, sinks, floors, tables, water fountains or any areas where a sick individual has been.

What should I do about it?

This may potentially be a serious illness. Persons who have these symptoms should see their physicians. This is a **reportable disease** to the Health Department. Children can **NOT** be in school/daycare and need a certified clearance of two negative stools cultures before being re-admitted. Antibiotics are generally not used.

For more information, please contact the Santa Rosa County Health Department at 850-983-5200.

