

***E. coli* O157:H7 Information Sheet**

What is *E. coli* O157:H7?

E. coli O157:H7 is one of hundreds of strains of the bacteria *Escherichia coli*. While most strains are harmless and live in the intestines of healthy humans and animals, this is one of the strains that cause severe illness.

How can you catch *E. coli* O157:H7?

- **Food and drinks:** Especially undercooked ground beef, needle-tenderized meat, unpasteurized milk or dairy products, unpasteurized juices, or other contaminated foods.
- **Infected animals or people:** Contact with animals or feces at farms, zoos, fairs or pet shops. Or, contact with infected people who didn't wash their hands after using the bathroom.
- **Contaminated water:** Sewage or animal waste in the water you drink, or where you swim.

People with this infection should NOT work as food handlers, healthcare providers or childcare workers until symptoms have stopped!

Children with this infection should NOT attend childcare until symptoms have stopped!

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

Abdominal cramps, vomiting and diarrhea (sometimes bloody) are common. They usually start 3-4 days after exposure, but can happen 1-10 days later. Most people are sick for 5-10 days. *E. coli* can be more serious in children under five, older adults, and people with weak immune systems.

Hemolytic Uremic Syndrome (HUS) is a rare complication. People with HUS may urinate less than usual, feel tired, look pale, or have swelling. Anyone with these symptoms after *E. coli* infection should see a doctor right away. HUS is an emergency and can cause kidney failure, anemia and sometimes death.

How can you be treated for *E. coli* O157:H7?

Supportive treatment, such as fluid replacement, is best. CDC does not recommend treating patients with *E. coli* infections with antibiotics, due to the risk of developing HUS.

How can you prevent *E. coli* O157:H7?

- Cook ground beef and needle-tenderized meat thoroughly
- Separate raw meat from other food
- Wash hands, utensils, and counters with hot and soapy water after any contact with raw meat
- Wash produce carefully
- Drink only pasteurized milk, juice, and cider
- Don't swallow water while swimming
- Wash hands after being near animals