



# PUBLIC FACT SHEET

## ESCHERICHIA COLI 0157:H7 (E. COLI)

### What is E. coli 0157:H7?

E. coli 0157:H7 is a special form of intestinal bacteria that produces a powerful poison capable of causing severe human illness.

### How is E. coli 0157:H7 spread?

E. coli 0157:H7 may be spread the following ways:

- eating meat that has been contaminated during the slaughtering process
- eating contaminated raw or undercooked meats, poultry, or eggs, especially beef
- eating contaminated unwashed vegetables, like sprouts or lettuce
- drinking unpasteurized milk or juice
- drinking contaminated water
- swimming in contaminated water
- not washing hands after using the restroom or changing diapers

### What are possible symptoms?

Symptoms of E. coli may include:

- bloody diarrhea
- abdominal cramps

Occasionally, there are no symptoms at all.

*About 2% to 7% of the elderly and children under 5 years of age who get E. coli 0157:H7 progress to a complication called hemolytic uremic syndrome (HUS) in which the red blood cells are destroyed and the kidneys fail.*

HUS symptoms can include:

- high blood pressure
- seizures
- blindness
- paralysis

### How is E. coli 0157:H7 diagnosed?

E. coli 0157:H7 is usually diagnosed through a stool test. All persons who suddenly get bloody diarrhea should get their stool tested. Subsequent stool tests will help determine when a person is no longer infected.

### What is the treatment for E. coli 0157:H7?

E. coli 0157:H7 has no specific treatment and usually resolves within 5-10 days. Persons with the infection need to drink plenty of liquids. Anti-diarrheal medicine such as *Imodium* and *Lomotil* should be avoided.

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

- cook all ground beef and hamburger thoroughly (internal temperature of at least 155°F for 15 seconds)
- prepare meat, poultry, or eggs away from other foods
- wash your hands after handling meat
- clean counters with hot soapy water after contact with raw or undercooked meat, poultry, or eggs
- drink only pasteurized milk, juice, and cider
- wash fruits and vegetables thoroughly
- avoid drinking lake and pool water while swimming
- wash your hands with soap after using the bathroom, changing diapers, and before preparing food and drinks

### For more information on E. coli 0157:H7 contact:

Ottawa County Health Department  
[www.miOttawa.org](http://www.miOttawa.org)

Center for Disease Control and Prevention  
<http://www.bt.cdc.gov/>  
Phone: (888) 246-2675