

E. coli O157:H7

What is *E. coli* O157:H7?

E. coli O157:H7 is a bacterium that can cause illness. Young children are at risk for developing HUS (hemolytic-uremic syndrome) and adults are at risk for developing post-diarrheal TTP (thrombocytopenic purpura). Both HUS and TTP can be fatal.

How do I get *E. coli* O157:H7?

You must ingest (swallow or eat) the *E. coli* O157:H7 bacteria to become infected. *E. coli* O157:H7 is usually spread through the following:

- *E. coli* O157:H7 can be found in raw meats (especially ground beef), unpasteurized milk, unpasteurized juice and contaminated water.
- Raw meats and raw meat juices can spread the bacteria if they touch ready-to-eat foods (salads, breads, cheeses, etc.), food preparation surfaces and utensils (cutting boards, plates, knives, etc.) or hands.
- People who have become infected with *E. coli* O157:H7 will have the bacteria in their feces (stools). If people do not properly wash their hands after using the restroom or changing diapers, and then handle food others will eat or objects people will put in their mouths (e.g., toys), they can spread the bacteria to other people.
- *E. coli* O157:H7 is **NOT** spread from one person to another by coughing or sneezing, sharing drinks, hugging or kissing.

Symptoms

Symptoms begin 1-10 days (usually 3-4 days) after ingesting the bacteria. Some infected people may not have any symptoms, but still be able to spread the bacteria. Symptoms include:

- Sudden onset of diarrhea (often becomes bloody as the illness progresses)
- Severe stomach pains
- Fever and vomiting (for some people)

Prevention

- Cook meats until well done and juices run clear. Ground beef must be cooked to 155°F.
- Keep all meats cold (below 41°F) and do not drink unpasteurized milk or juice.
- Wash all fruits (including cantaloupes and watermelons) and vegetables before preparing or eating them.
- Wash and sanitize food preparation surfaces and utensils after preparing raw meats.
- Always wash your hands after handling raw meats, after using the restroom, after changing diapers and before preparing food.

Treatment for *E. coli* O157:H7

Most symptoms will go away on their own in a few days. If symptoms persist or are severe, see your health care provider.

If you think you have E. coli O157:H7:

- Do not prepare food for others.
- If your job includes handling food, working with children or if you work in healthcare, do not go to work and see your health care provider.
- Children who might have *E. coli* O157:H7 must not go to child care settings – especially if they have diarrhea and should see a health care provider.



Hand washing steps:

1. Use soap and warm running water.
2. Scrub hands for at least 20 seconds; use a nail brush.
3. Wash all surfaces:
 - Between fingers
 - Under fingernails
 - Back of hands
 - Wrists
4. Rinse well and dry hands with a clean paper towel.