

Verotoxigenic E. Coli

FACT SHEET

What is Verotoxigenic E. Coli?

E. coli (Escherichia coli) are bacteria that normally live in the intestines of humans and animals. Most strains are harmless but some make toxins that can cause diarrhea and more severe illness. One type of these toxin-producing strains is called Verotoxigenic E. coli. One of the more common strains is O157:H7.

Verotoxigenic E. coli can sometimes make people very sick.

In some people (particularly children under five years of age), Verotoxigenic E. coli can cause a hemolytic uremic syndrome (HUS). This happens in about 2 to 7% of cases. HUS is a serious disease that destroys red blood cells and causes kidney failure. Most people recover from HUS but it can be fatal.

Anyone can get Verotoxigenic E. coli.

How is it spread?

You can get Verotoxigenic E. coli by:

- Eating undercooked meat, especially ground beef (Contaminated meat looks and smells normal.)
- Drinking unpasteurized milk or juice
- Drinking or swimming in water contaminated by sewage
- Petting animals that may carry the bacteria

You can also get E. coli by coming in contact with the stools of infected persons. This happens when proper hand washing technique is not followed.

Individuals with E. coli can still spread the germ for days to weeks after symptoms stop.

What are the Symptoms?

The symptoms include:

- Severe bloody diarrhea
- Abdominal cramps
- Vomiting

Sometimes the infection causes non-bloody diarrhea. Sometimes there are no symptoms. Usually there is little or no fever.

What is the Treatment?

Most persons recover in 5-10 days without treatment. There is no evidence that antibiotics help treat the disease.

How Can You Prevent Verotoxigenic E. coli?

- Handle food safely:
 - Cook all ground beef until a thermometer pushed into center of the meat reads 71° C (160F).
 - Keep raw meat separate from other foods in the kitchen.
 - Wash hands, cutting boards and counter tops with hot soapy water if they touch raw meat.
 - Thaw frozen meat in the refrigerator.
 - Wash all fruit and vegetables before eating.
- Always wash hands:
 - Before eating or preparing food.
 - After using the toilet, changing a diaper, or touching an animal.
- Drink only water treated with chlorine or other effective disinfectants.
- Avoid swallowing lake or pool water while swimming.
- Drink only pasteurized milk, apple juice and cider. Eat only pasteurized cheese.
- If you have diarrhea:
 - Do not swim in public pools or lakes.
 - Do not share baths with others.
 - Do not prepare food for others.
 - Do not provide personal care for others.
- Use non chlorinated pools, wading pools, kiddie pools, backyard pools, hot tubs, lakes, etc. with caution.