

# Verotoxin-Producing E.Coli Fact Sheet

## What is E. coli?

*Escherichia (E).coli 0157:H7* is a bacterium that produces a verotoxin (poison) that can make people very sick.

## What is the incubation period?

The incubation period, or the time between when the bacteria enters your body and symptoms first appear, is usually 3 to 4 days. It can be as short as 12 hours or as long as 8 days.

## What are the symptoms?

Symptoms include nausea, abdominal cramps, watery diarrhea leading to bloody diarrhea, vomiting and low grade fever. The illness can cause hemolytic uremic syndrome (HUS), a major cause of kidney failure. This serious illness can cause death.

## How is E. coli spread?

The bacteria are found in a small percentage of cattle. In humans it has caused outbreaks of illness related to eating undercooked ground beef, and has been dubbed “hamburger disease” or “BBQ syndrome”. The bacteria found on the outside of the meat become mixed throughout the meat during the grinding process. It has also been found in unpasteurized milk, contaminated water, and unpasteurized apple cider. Water supplies have been found to contain fecal bacteria from cattle. Apples used to make cider are sometimes picked up from the ground in orchards where cattle graze. Person-to-person spread occurs when an infected person does not wash their hands after using the toilet, and then prepares food for others to eat.

## How can you prevent illness?

- Cook all ground meats to 71°C (160°F) except ground poultry which must be cooked to 74°C 165°F).
- Wash your hands for 20 seconds with soap and warm water after handling raw meats.
- Always wash your hands thoroughly with soap and water after using the toilet.
- Utensils, cutting boards and plates used for raw meats should be thoroughly washed with detergent and hot water.
- Never put cooked or ready-to-eat foods on plates or cutting boards previously used for raw meats.
- Do not drink unpasteurized milk.
- Thaw ground meat in a deep container on the lowest shelf of the refrigerator. The container should be large enough to prevent blood and juice from spilling out.

## Other Questions?

Talk to your health care provider or call our Communicable Disease Program at 613-966-5500 x349. Toll Free 1-800-267-2803 | TTY Dial 711 (1-800-267-6511) | [www.hpepublichealth.ca](http://www.hpepublichealth.ca)

## Resource

- Kingston Frontenac Lennox & Addington Health Unit, E-coli 0157:H7, March 2010.

**CD-228**  
2011/09/22

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