

## E. coli

### What is E. coli?

Escherichia coli (abbreviated as E. coli) are bacteria found in the environment, foods, and intestines of people and animals. E. coli are a large and diverse group of bacteria. Although most strains of E. coli are harmless, others can make you sick. Some kinds of E. coli can cause diarrhea, while others cause urinary tract infections, respiratory illness and pneumonia, and other illnesses.

### How is E. coli spread?

People get E. coli by consuming a food or drink that contains the bacteria.

Most cases of E. coli come from cattle meat. The E. coli bacteria live in the gut of animals. When the animal is killed, the bacteria can spread during meat processing. If the meat is not cooked thoroughly enough to kill the E. coli bacteria, it will cause illness in the person who eats it. E. coli can also be spread from other animal meats such as goat, sheep, deer, elk, pigs, and birds.

A person can also get E. coli from drinking unpasteurized milk or apple cider or eating soft cheeses made from raw milk. People have gotten infected by swallowing lake water while swimming, touching the environment in petting zoos and other animal exhibits, and by eating food prepared by people who did not wash their hands well after using the toilet. Almost everyone has some risk of infection.



### What are the symptoms?

- Severe stomach cramps
- Vomiting
- Diarrhea, which is often bloody
- Some people may have a fever though it is usually not very high

### When should I go to the doctor?

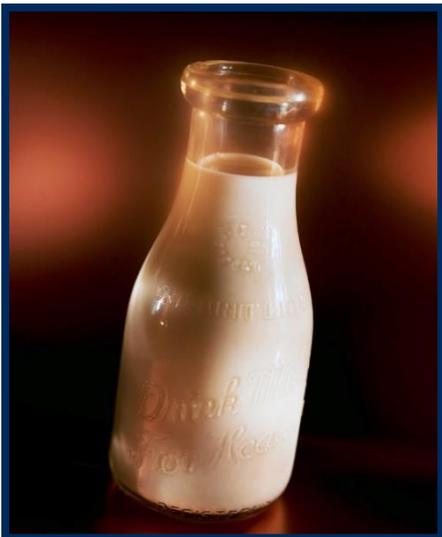
You should contact your doctor if your diarrhea lasts for more than 3 days or is accompanied by high fever, blood in the stool (poop) or frequent enough vomiting that you cannot keep liquids down and are passing very little urine (pee).

## Can complications occur from E. coli?

Yes, 5 to 10% of people diagnosed with certain strains of E. coli develop hemolytic uremic syndrome (HUS) which can be life threatening. HUS causes the red blood cells to be destroyed and can cause kidney failure. Patients with HUS should be hospitalized for treatment.

## How common are E. coli infections?

Around 265,000 infections occur in the United States each year. Estimates vary because not all infected people seek medical care or submit stool samples for testing.



## How are E. coli infections diagnosed?

E. coli is diagnosed through testing done on stool samples. If your physician thinks you may have an E. coli infection, they will request a stool sample from you.

## How are E. coli infection treated?

Non-specific supportive therapy, including hydration, is important. Antibiotics should not be used to treat this infection. There is no evidence that treatment with antibiotics is helpful and taking antibiotics may increase the risk of HUS. Antidiarrheal agents like Imodium® may also increase that risk.

## How can I prevent E. coli infections?

- WASH YOUR HANDS thoroughly after using the bathroom or changing diapers and before preparing or eating food. WASH YOUR HANDS after contact with animals or their environments (at farms, petting zoos, fairs, even your own backyard).
- COOK meats thoroughly. Ground beef and meat that has been needle-tenderized should be cooked to a temperature of at least 160°F/70°C. It's best to use a thermometer, as color is not a very reliable indicator of "doneness."
- AVOID raw milk, unpasteurized dairy products, and unpasteurized juices (like fresh apple cider).
- AVOID swallowing water when swimming or playing in lakes, ponds, streams, swimming pools, and backyard "kiddie" pools.
- PREVENT cross contamination in food preparation areas by thoroughly washing hands, counters, cutting boards, and utensils after they touch raw meat.

## For more information:

Visit the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention's website at <https://www.cdc.gov/ecoli/index.html> or call Huron County Public Health at 419-668-1652 ext. 269.