



Caring for the Community
since the 1930s

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FACT SHEET

E. coli

What is E. Coli?

E coli is a germ that causes severe cramps and diarrhea.

How is E. coli spread?

You can get E.coli infection by:

- Eating under cooked beef (especially hamburger)
- Swimming in or drinking contaminated (impure) water
- Drinking unpasteurized (raw) milk
- Inadequate hygiene (handwashing) habits

What are symptoms of E. coli?

E. coli infection often causes a range of symptoms. The most common are diarrhea and abdominal cramps. Usually little or no fever is present, and the illness resolves in 5 to 10 days.

In some persons particularly children under 5 years of age and the elderly, the infection can also cause severe diarrhea, stomach cramps and blood in the stool. In about 2-7% of infections lead to the destruction of red blood cells and kidney failure.

How is E. coli diagnosed?

Infection with E coli is diagnosed by detecting the bacteria in the stool.

How is E. coli treated?

Most persons recover without special treatment in 5-10 days. Drinking large amounts of fluids will help. In severe cases treatment is in an intensive care unit where blood transfusions and kidney dialysis are required.

How can E. coli be prevented?

- Before cooking, wash hands with soap and water
- Cook all beef and hamburger thoroughly
- Don't drink pasteurized milk, juice and cider
- Keep hot food hot, and cold food cold
- Wash fruits and vegetables thoroughly
- Avoid swallowing lake or pool water while swimming
- Drink non-contaminated (treated or bottled) water
- Wash hands thoroughly with soap and water after using the bathroom or changing a diaper

More information can be found at the Center for Disease Control's website: <http://www.cdc.gov/az.do>