



E. coli (Escherichia coli)

What is Escherichia coli (E. coli)?

E. coli is a common bacterium that lives in the intestines of animals and people. There are many strains of *E. coli*, most are harmless, but some can be more harmful than others. Persons can become infected with *E. coli* by ingesting contaminated food or water.

How is E. coli spread?

E. coli can be spread through any type of food contaminated with this bacterium. *E. coli* can be spread through contaminated and/or undercooked ground beef, unpasteurized milk and juice, as well as contaminated raw vegetables and fruit. Spread can occur through drinking water, lakes and swimming pools contaminated with sewage. *E. coli* can be spread by adults who do not wash their hands thoroughly after changing diapers or going to the toilet, and from an infected person to another if personal hygiene is poor.

How is E. coli treated?

E. coli diarrhea generally resolves without treatment, and antibiotics are not usually required. Additional fluids may be needed to prevent dehydration, especially among children. On rare occasions, hospitalization may be required to combat blood and kidney complications.

How can E. coli be prevented?

- Wash hands thoroughly with warm, soapy water after using the bathroom, changing diapers, and/or before and during preparation of food.
- Cook ground beef thoroughly. All of the pink color should be gone before serving.
- Never put cooked hamburgers or meat on the plate they were on before cooking.
- Have two cutting boards, one for meat and one for other foods.

- Wash and disinfect cutting boards and counters after use. Use an antibacterial soap or a solution of one tablespoon bleach to one-half cup water.
- Wash all fruits and vegetables well. Use a stiff brush and wash vigorously, peel if possible.
- Refrigerate uneaten cooked foods immediately to prevent bacterial growth. When serving leftovers, heat thoroughly.
- Drink only pasteurized milk, juice or cider. Drink water only from safe sources. Do not swallow lake or pool water while swimming.
- Infected food handlers, health care workers, and day care attendees or workers should be excluded until symptoms have subsided and stool samples test negative.

Symptoms of E. coli:

- Watery or bloody diarrhea
- Vomiting
- Severe abdominal pain and cramping
- Fever

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CDC Public Information

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