



Fact Sheet: Shiga-toxin producing E.coli (STEC)

This fact sheet is for information only and is not meant to be used for self-diagnosis or as a substitute for consultation with a health care provider. For more information contact your health care provider or visit the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention at www.cdc.gov.

What is Shiga-toxin producing E. coli (STEC)?

E. coli are bacteria that normally live in the intestines of humans and animals. There are many strains of E. coli bacteria that are mostly harmless. However, some kinds of E. coli cause illness by making a toxin. These bacteria are referred to as Shiga-toxin producing E. coli (STEC). These infections may be associated with other severe problems, such as bleeding due to irritation of the bowel, kidney damage, or blood cell damage. Symptoms appear 2 to 10 days after exposure, with an average of 3 to 4 days.

What are the symptoms?

- Diarrhea (which often becomes bloody)
- Stomach cramps
- Vomiting
- A mild fever, in some cases

How is it spread?

- Mainly by eating contaminated foods such as melons, lettuce, spinach, alfalfa sprouts, or soft cheeses made from raw milk.
- By eating raw or undercooked meat, especially ground beef.
- By drinking unpasteurized milk, apple cider, or contaminated water.
- Infected individuals may spread the illness to others if they do not wash their hands properly.
- Adults infected with E. coli are contagious for a week; children for up to 3 weeks.
- By swallowing contaminated lake or pool water.
- By touching contaminated surfaces in petting zoos or other animal exhibits.

How is it treated?

If a person thinks that he/she has been exposed, call a doctor immediately for a stool sample test and treatment recommendations. As with any diarrhea, it is important to drink plenty of fluids such as fruit juice and water to prevent dehydration.

Food service workers, healthcare workers or childcare workers must report their sickness to their immediate supervisor and not work until the illness is over. A medical provider must provide documentation that it is OK for the person to return back to work.

How is E. coli (STEC) prevented?

- Wash hands thoroughly after handling raw meat.
- Fully cook all ground beef products to an internal temperature of 165° F (use a thermometer).
- Do not place cooked meat on the same plate that was used to hold raw meat.
- Use two cutting boards, one for meat and one for other foods. Wash cutting boards and counters after each use with hot, soapy water
- Thaw frozen foods inside cold water, refrigerator, or in a microwave.
- Wash all fruits and vegetables thoroughly with water before eating.
- Consume only pasteurized milk and milk products.
- Use good hygiene and wash hands after using the bathroom, changing a diaper, and before eating.
- Keep infected children away from other children and from the elderly.

Detroit Health Department
3245 E. Jefferson Suite 100
Detroit, Michigan 48207
313-876-4000
www.detroitmi.gov/health

- Avoid swallowing water from swimming pools, lakes, ponds and streams.
- Wash hands after going to a petting zoo or handling animals.
- Follow doctor's advice about returning back to school or day care.

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