

E. COLI

What is E.Coli O157?

E.Coli is one of the bacteria that line the gut of humans and animals. It can also be found in raw meat, especially in undercooked beef, or infected milk or water. Most strains are harmless but some like E.Coli O157 can cause food poisoning.

How do I know that I have E.Coli O157?

E.Coli O157 can only be confirmed by testing a sample of your faeces (not urine) at the request of your doctor or environmental health officer.

How is it spread?

E.Coli O157 is present in the environment but cattle are thought to be the main source of infection. It is spread by eating contaminated food such as undercooked beef burgers, raw vegetables washed or watered with contaminated water, or drinking untreated milk or dairy products. Contact with infected animals, particularly on farms, wildlife parks and associated areas can also cause this infection. It requires only a small number of bacteria to cause this infection.

What are the symptoms?

It can cause diarrhoea, sometimes bloody, and abdominal pain. The infection can range from mild to very serious, particularly in children under 5 years.

How soon after exposure do symptoms appear?

Symptoms usually start within 1-3 days.

Do infected people need to stay away from work or school?

If you have diarrhoea you must tell your employer/manager immediately.

You must not go to work, school or nursery if you have symptoms and belong to the following high risk, groups; -

- Children under 5 years who go to playgroup, pre school, nurseries, school or similar groups.
- Older children or adults who are unable to carry out good personal hygiene.
- Food handlers, especially those who handle food to be eaten raw or without further cooking.
- Health care workers who have direct contact, or contact through serving food. e.g. in nursing or residential care homes

People in these groups must not return to school etc or work until 2 faecal samples taken at least 48 hours apart have been found clear of the E.Coli bacteria.

Contacts who are children under 5 years or older children/adults unable to carry out good personal hygiene should not attend school or work until they have provided a clear faecal sample.

Other cases may return to school or work 48 hours after the symptoms have stopped.

How long is a person able to spread the infection?

Infected people can spread E.Coli O157 in their faeces for many weeks, especially in the case of young children. If the diarrhoea continues or turns bloody you should seek medical advice quickly. A very few cases may go on to develop extreme illness, which may lead to kidney failure.

How can I stop the infection spreading?

Cleaning the toilet

For as long as people are unwell:

- wipe the toilet seat with disinfectant after each use
- wash and disinfect other items like bedpans or potties after each use.
- use a cloth soaked in disinfectant to wipe the toilet seat, flush handle, washbasin taps, and door handle two or three times a day.
- clean the toilet bowl using a (toilet) brush and disinfectant. Rinse the brush by flushing the toilet, and replace in its holder.
- keep any rubber gloves used for cleaning the toilet for this use only.
- flush the toilet with the seat and lid down.
- Laundry
- keep dirty laundry from anyone with food poisoning separate
- if possible remove any heavy soiling into the toilet before washing
- wash soiled clothing and bedding separately on as hot a washing programme as possible without exceeding fabric care instructions.

Points to remember

- make sure everybody follows these precautions
- assist young children to wash their hands properly