

Prevention and Control Measures: *Escherichia coli (E. coli)*

What is *Escherichia coli*?

Escherichia coli, commonly known as *E. coli*, is a diverse group of bacteria that normally live in the intestines of people and animals but can also be found in the environment, foods, and water. Most strains of this germ are harmless and even play a role in maintaining a healthy intestinal tract, but some kinds cause disease by making a toxin (poison) called Shiga toxin. The most commonly identified Shiga toxin-producing *E. coli* (STEC) in the United States is *E. coli* O157:H7.

Transmission:

- **Water-to-Person:** Waterborne transmission occurs both from contaminated drinking water and from recreational waters (lakes, ponds, streams, and swimming pools).
- **Person-to-Person:** Caring for sick people with vomiting and diarrhea can occur in families, childcare centers, and custodial institutions.
- **Food-to-Person:** Eating food or drinking liquid handled by a sick person who did not wash their hands well or drinking contaminated unpasteurized (raw) milk or juice.
- **Surface-to-Person:** Touching a surface or object handled by a sick person or within an animal living area, such as a petting zoo, then touching your mouth.

Symptoms:

- Symptoms include severe stomach cramps and diarrhea (often bloody). Sometimes the diarrhea turns bloody after 3 or 4 days. Some people vomit or have a fever, but these are less common. Fever, if present, is usually less than 101°F.
- These symptoms usually go away by themselves after 5 to 7 days. In a small number of people including young children, the elderly, and those with health problems STEC can cause a rare, but serious and sometimes life-threatening, problem called hemolytic uremic syndrome (HUS).
- Children and pregnant women should take special care to avoid dehydration.



Prevention and Control Measures:

- Wash your hands thoroughly after using the bathroom, changing diapers, before preparing or eating food, and after contact with animals or their environments (at farms, petting zoos, fairs, or even in your own back yard).
- Adults and children, with diarrhea or loose stools, should not be in childcare facilities until their diarrhea has resolved.
- When camping, hiking, or traveling, always use safe water for drinking, cooking, brushing your teeth, or other activities.
- Wash yourself and your child thoroughly with soap and water before swimming.
- Take your kids on bathroom breaks or check diapers often when swimming and do not change diapers poolside.
- Do not swallow water when swimming or playing in lakes, ponds, streams, swimming pools and backyard "kiddie" pools.
- Do not swim for 2 weeks after the diarrhea has stopped.

For More Information: Visit cdc.gov and type [E. coli](#) in the SEARCH box.



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