



E.Coli (VTEC)

E.Coli bacteria live in the intestines of healthy people and animals, usually without causing illness. Most types are harmless but some can cause specific disease, such as 0157.

E.Coli 0157 can cause serious illness (occasionally fatal) by producing powerful toxins. It can also cause outbreaks.

How can I confirm I have it?

If you are suffering symptoms of E.Coli 0157, visit your doctor who can arrange a test using a stool (faecal) sample.

How is it treated?

Diarrhoea usually settles down without specific treatment but complications may need appropriate treatment. Antibiotics are not recommended.

How can I get it?

Most people are infected with E.Coli 0157 by:

- Contact with some farm animals or animal faeces, mainly calves and cows
- Consuming unpasteurised milk and dairy products
- Drinking contaminated water
- Eating contaminated food, particularly uncooked minced beef
- Infection can be spread from person-to-person – so wash and dry hands thoroughly after going to the toilet.

How can I prevent spread?

Prepare food carefully:

- Cook meat thoroughly (especially minced meat)
- If reheating meat, make sure its piping hot
- Keep raw meat separate from cooked foods during preparation
- Clean knives, cutting boards and other surfaces after contact with meat
- Carefully wash all fruit and vegetables before eating.



Wash hands thoroughly:

Wash hands using the 20/20 rule (wash hands for 20 seconds with soap and hot water and dry hands for 20 seconds with a clean towel or paper towel)

- Before and after handling food and eating
- After going to the toilet or changing nappies
- After playing or working with animals.
- After touching uncooked beef or other meats.

Taking time off work or school

If you have diarrhoea, even if the cause is unknown, don't attend early childhood centres, school or work.

Children with E.Coli 0157 should stay away from early childhood centres until tests show they are free of the bacteria

Infected people in high risk occupations involving food preparation, looking after children or nursing, should not return to work until they are free of the bacteria.

To ensure the bacteria is no longer present, you need two consecutive negative stool samples taken more than 24 hours apart. Contacts of cases (friends, family) don't have to stay home unless they develop symptoms, especially diarrhoea.

What are the symptoms?

- Usually you will have diarrhoea, which may contain blood after 2-3 days
- Symptoms usually last between 5-10 days and most people recover without any long term illness
- Some people show no symptoms but are still capable of passing it on to others
- Children under five and elderly people have a higher risk of severe symptoms.

How long could I be infected?

You can be infectious until there are no bacteria in the intestines - this can be up to a month from when the diarrhoea started.

For more information contact a Health Protection Officer at Toi Te Ora Public Health Service, free phone 0800 221 555.