What is E.coli?

E. coli (Escherichia coli) are bacteria that normally live in the intestines of animals and humans. There are many strains of E. coli bacteria. Most are harmless and play an important part of a healthy human intestinal tract. However, one particular strain, E. coli O157:H7, may cause serious illness in people by making a toxin called Shiga toxin.

How is it spread?

- E. coli can be spread to people through consuming raw or undercooked beef.
- It can also be spread by consuming contaminated water or foods such as melons, lettuce, spinach, apple cider, coleslaw, alfalfa sprouts, or unpasteurized milk.
- Infected individuals may spread the illness to others by not washing their hands well after a bowel movement or contact with animals.
- E. coli can also spread from contaminated drinking or recreational water.

Signs and Symptoms

- Stomach cramps
- Diarrhea that may contain blood
- Vomiting
- Severe infection may lead to kidney problems

Symptoms appear from 1 to 10 days after exposure, with an average of 3 to 4 days. An adult infected with E. coli is contagious for approximately 7 days. However, children may be contagious for up to 3 weeks.

If you are a food service worker, a health care worker, or a childcare worker, report your illness to your supervisor and do not work until your medical provider says it is OK.

Treatment

- If you think you have been exposed, call your health care provider immediately for a stool sample test and treatment recommendations.
- Drink plenty of fluids to prevent dehydration.

Prevention

- Wash all fruits and vegetables thoroughly before eating
- Fully cook ground beef products to 160 degrees Fahrenheit
- Wash hands after handling ground beef and wash all utensils that have been exposed to the raw meat.
- Reduce cross contamination by using separate cutting boards for raw meat and vegetables. Disinfect cutting boards.
- Keep thawing and uneaten cooked foods in the refrigerator
- Do not consume raw milk, raw milk products, or any other unpasteurized product
- Wash your hands after going to the bathroom, changing a diaper, working with animals and before preparing or eating food

Be Food Safe.
Separate.
Do NOT Cross Contaminate!

This fact sheet is for informational purposes and is not meant to be used for self-diagnosis or as a substitute for consultation with a health care professional. For more information about communicable disease, speak to your health care provider or call the Ingham County Health Department at (517)-887-4308.

Visit our website at http://hd.ingham.org
or the Centers for Disease Control & Prevention at: www.cdc.gov
Ingham County Health Department 5303 S. Cedar St. Lansing, MI 48911
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