



**Public Health**  
Prevent. Promote. Protect.

Public Health – Muskegon County

# E. coli O157:H7 Fact Sheet

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## What is E. coli O157:H7?

E. coli O157:H7 is a special form of intestinal bacteria that produces a powerful poison capable of causing severe human illness.

## How is E. coli O157:H7 spread?

E. coli O157:H7 may be spread the following ways:

- Eating meat that has been contaminated during the slaughtering process
- Eating contaminated raw or undercooked meats, poultry, or eggs, especially beef
- Eating contaminated unwashed vegetables, like sprouts or lettuce
- Drinking unpasteurized milk or juice
- Drinking contaminated water
- Swimming in contaminated water
- Not washing hands after using the restroom or changing diapers

## What are possible symptoms?

Symptoms of E. coli may include:

- Bloody diarrhea
- Abdominal cramps

Occasionally, there are no symptoms at all. *About 2% to 7% of the elderly and children under 5 years of age who get E. coli O157:H7 progress to a complication called hemolytic uremic syndrome (HUS) in which the red blood cells are destroyed and the kidneys fail.*

HUS symptoms can include:

- High blood pressure
- Seizures
- Blindness
- Paralysis

## How is E. coli O157:H7 diagnosed?

E. coli O157:H7 is usually diagnosed through a stool test. All persons who suddenly get bloody diarrhea should get their stool tested. Subsequent stool tests will help determine when a person is no longer infected.

## What is the treatment for E. coli O157:H7?

E. coli O157:H7 has no specific treatment and usually resolves within 5-10 days. Persons with the infection need to drink plenty of liquids.

Antidiarrheal medicine such as *Imodium* and *Lomotil* should be avoided.

How can E. coli O157:H7 be prevented?

- Cook all ground beef and hamburger thoroughly (internal temperature of at least 155°F for 15 seconds)
- Prepare meat, poultry, or eggs away from other foods
- Wash your hands after handling meat
- Clean counters with hot soapy water after contact with raw or undercooked meat, poultry, or eggs
- Drink only pasteurized milk, juice, and cider
- Wash fruits and vegetables thoroughly
- Avoid drinking lake and pool water while swimming
- Wash your hands with soap after using the bathroom, changing diapers, and before preparing food and drinks

## For more information on E. coli O157:H7:

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC)  
<http://www.bt.cdc.gov/agent/food/>

### CDC Public Information

English	1-888-246-2675
Espanol	1-888-246-2857
TTY	1-888-874-2646

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