

E. coli

What is it?

E. coli is a group of bacteria that usually live in the intestine of people and animals. Most types are harmless, but some can cause “Travellers’ diarrhoea” or other bouts of diarrhoea.

What are the symptoms?

Your symptoms might have included:

- very watery diarrhoea; and
- dehydration.

The illness usually starts 1-3 days after eating contaminated food.

What about the mess?

- If you have to clear up diarrhoea or other mess, take care and wear rubber gloves. Scoop up what you can with a dustpan or paper towel. Rinse down a WC, don’t use a sink that is used for food preparation or washing up. Wash what is left with cloths, and warm soapy water. Pour dirty water down a WC afterwards. Clean all cloths and equipment with dilute bleach (1 eggcup in a small bucket of warm (not hot) water);
- wash soiled sheets and clothing straight away. Fold them so that you don’t touch the dirty parts. Wash on as hot a wash as possible. Do not over fill the washing machine;
- make sure everyone uses his or her own towel and face cloth.

How did I catch it?

The usual way is eating or drinking something containing E. coli bacteria.

As E. coli comes from animals, eating food like:

- raw and undercooked meat and meat products (for example undercooked beef burgers); and
- unpasteurised milk;

are the most likely sources.

Other sources are:

- infected people (especially in households, nurseries and schools); and
 - handling infected animals including pets and farm animals.
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How long does it last?

Symptoms can last for 1 – 5 days with this illness.

How is it treated?

There is not a specific treatment for E. coli infection. Symptoms clear up on their own.

It is important to keep drinking (clear fluids such as water or dilute squash are a good idea) to stop dehydration.

Rest will also help.

Can I give it to someone else?

While this can happen it is less likely if care is taken when cleaning up any mess and preparing food. Types of E. coli are connected with nurseries, where great care is required to stop it spreading to other children.

When can I go back to work/ school/ nursery?

If you work with food, are under 5 years old attending school/ nursery or care for vulnerable people you should stay away until the diarrhoea has stopped for 48 hours. You must still maintain good personal hygiene when you return.

What can I do to prevent getting it again?

1. Food

- If you are ill avoid preparing food for yourself or others;
- make sure all risky foods such as mince and burgers are thoroughly cooked. Make sure there is no pink meat present;
- be careful not to spread the organism from raw to ready to- eat food such as cold meats and salad;
- clean and disinfect worktops after preparing raw meat; and
- make sure your fridge and freezer are working properly. The temperatures should be 1 - 4°C and minus 18°C respectively (if you do not have a fridge thermometer, why not buy one).

2. Wash your hands

Everyone in the household should take care to wash their hands properly with soap and rinse them under running water after using the toilet and:

- after you've cleared up diarrhoea;
- after you've been nursing ill people;
- after you've handled laundry or changed nappies;
- before you cook or eat; and
- often during the preparation of food (especially after handling raw meat).

An antibacterial soap is an additional precaution.

For further information please contact:

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