

Fact Sheet

E. coli

What is *E. coli*?

E. coli (*Escherichia coli*) is a type of bacteria that normally live in the intestines of people and animals. Most bacteria are harmless but some make poisons that can cause diarrhea and more serious illness.

What are the symptoms?

The symptoms usually include diarrhea or stools with blood in it and stomach pains. Usually there is little or no fever. Sometimes the person will have diarrhea without blood in it, and sometimes there are no symptoms at all.

Who can get the infection?

Anyone can get *E. coli*. People who are most likely to be really sick include elders, babies and those who are weak from another illness, such as those being treated for cancer or people with HIV.

How does a person get it?

People usually get *E. coli* by eating food or drinking water that has the bacteria. The bacteria live in the stomach and intestines of many animals and can affect meat, vegetables, and fruit.

E. coli can be spread from person to person by not washing your hands properly after going to the toilet, or after cutting or cooking food with the bacteria.

What is the treatment for *E. coli*?

Usually *E. coli* does not need medicine; most people feel better in 5 to 10 days. In some serious cases, people need to go to a hospital to receive care and medicines.

How can it be prevented?

- Cook all ground beef and any store bought meat well.
- Wash raw vegetables and fruit before eating.
- Keep raw meats separate from vegetables and from cooked foods.
- Wash hands, knives, ulus, and cutting boards after handling raw foods.
- When drinking water from lakes or rivers, try to boil it first to make sure it is safe.