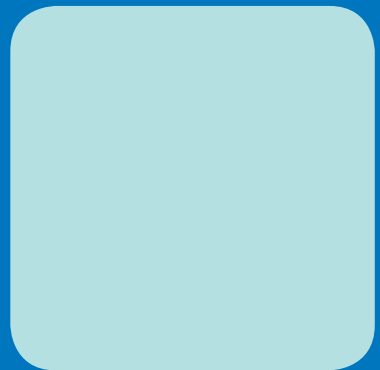


# E. coli

(including STEC 0157)



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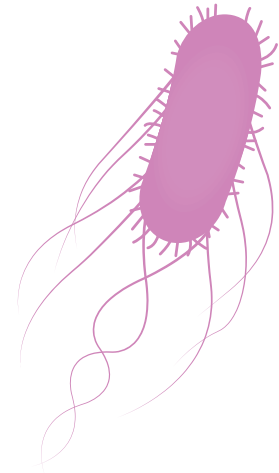
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**Escherichia coli can cause illness ranging from mild diarrhoea to life threatening conditions. STEC O157 is the most common type in the UK and in a small number of people can cause very serious illness called Haemolytic Uraemic Syndrome (HUS). The risk of HUS is highest in children aged five years and under.**

We know that STEC is very infectious and can be easily passed to others. It has also been the cause of several outbreaks following eating infected food, contact with infected people and touching infected animals or their poo.



## What are the symptoms and how long do they last?

It usually takes between two and four days from being infected with STEC to develop symptoms which may be:

- No symptoms.
- Very mild diarrhoea.
- Stomach pain.
- Vomiting.
- Fever.
- Severe diarrhoea with blood.
- Passing less urine than normal.
- Haemolytic uraemic syndrome (HUS).

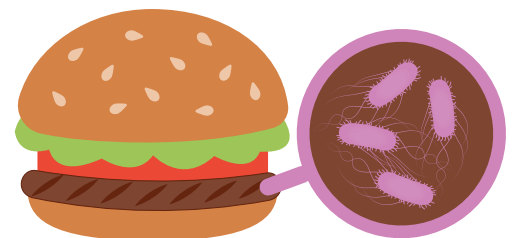
## Who is at risk?

Anyone can become infected with E. coli, but the consequences are greater for the very young who do not have fully developed immune systems.

## How do you catch it?

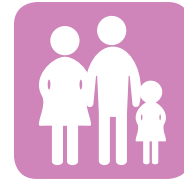
You may become infected with STEC in a variety of ways:

- Eating infected/contaminated food that has not been cooked all the way through, particularly minced meat products such as burgers and sausages, or salad items that have not been washed properly.
- Handling/preparation of food contaminated with soil for example, potatoes and leeks where the soil has not been washed away.
- Drinking infected/contaminated water such as from streams, rivers and lakes etc. which may contain animal poo.



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- Close contact with animals, particularly cattle, sheep and goats. Animal saliva may be infected because of the way animals clean themselves.
- Direct contact with animal poo on the animal itself, in their pen or on the floor
- Contact with an infected person, particularly if you don't wash your hands thoroughly after using the toilet or before handling food.

## How do you prevent others getting it?

Normal cooking temperatures kill STEC and it can be easily washed off your hands. For extra reassurance, you can use antibacterial gels/wipes AFTER washing your hands with soap and water.

### Key steps you can take include:

- Wash hands thoroughly with liquid soap and running water after using the toilet (or helping others including changing nappies), handling raw meat, before meals and after contact with animals. If you have false nails, pay particular attention to cleaning these thoroughly.
- Clean hard surfaces including toilet bowls, flush handles, taps and hand basins regularly with hot soapy water followed by a disinfectant/sanitiser.
- Wash dirty clothes, bedding and towels on the hottest wash cycle possible and do not share towels or face flannels with someone who is infected.
- Clean animal faeces from footwear/buggy wheels after visits to animal attractions and wash your hands after doing so.
- Stay away from work/school/nursery until 48 hours after you've stopped vomiting or having diarrhoea and comply with any additional exclusions recommended by the Environmental Health and/or Health Protection Teams.

## How do you treat E. coli?

Most people get better within 5 to 7 days. Treatment involves drinking plenty of fluids as vomiting and diarrhoea can lead to dehydration. Antibiotics should not be used as there is no evidence that they are helpful to treat STEC infections and they may increase the risk of complications.

Rarely, symptoms may be severe or even life-threatening causing Haemolytic Uraemic Syndrome (HUS) which may occur up to two weeks after the start of the diarrhoea. If your symptoms do not go away or you develop easy bruising, feel you are passing less urine than usual, or your urine is pink/brown in colour please urgently seek medical advice as these symptoms could indicate the start of HUS and you may need further tests.

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## Do you need to stay off work, school or nursery?

You should stay away from work/school or nursery until you have stopped having symptoms for at least 48 hours to avoid passing it on to others.

For some people, this time may be longer and further samples may be needed because of the higher chance of spreading the infection to others or spreading it to people who may be more likely to develop severe illness. This may include:

- Those that need help with their own personal hygiene at home, work or school.
- Children aged five years and under, particularly those attending nursery or pre-school groups.
- Those that prepare or serve unwrapped food that is not heated further.
- Healthcare workers with direct contact with highly susceptible patients for whom an infection like STEC could have serious consequences.

Children aged five years and under (up to sixth birthday)

Although rare, the risk of HUS is highest in children aged five years and under. Some children aged five years and under have also been shown to continue to pass STEC in their poo for longer than adults, sometimes for many weeks or even months.

For these reasons, children aged five years and under may need to stay away (be excluded) from childcare settings until their poo samples are clear of the infection. If there are other children aged five years and under in the household, they may also be excluded, whether they have symptoms or not, until poo samples show that they have not picked up the infection.

Your local PHE Health Protection or Environmental Health Officers will be in contact to advise you if exclusion is needed for you and/or your contacts. They will provide you with information on this clearance process and aim to support you to get you or your child back to normal activities as quickly as possible.

## Public Health England, Environmental Health Team and E. coli O157

Public Health England is an executive agency of the Department of Health and Social Care who provide advice on controlling outbreaks of infectious diseases. Their work involves trying to identify the source of infections to prevent other people becoming infected. They also monitor outbreaks and look for patterns and trends. This work is undertaken with assistance from local Environmental Health Teams within councils. These teams are notified of infectious diseases by Pathology laboratories and contact patients to obtain as much information about their illness as possible to try to identify how the infection was acquired, offer advice and prevent the spread of illness.

If you would like further information, please contact the Food & Public Protection Team at Carlisle City Council on **01228 817329**.