

STEC FACTSHEET

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What is Shiga-toxin Producing *E. Coli* (STEC)?

STEC is a type of *E. coli* bacteria that causes a serious infection involving the gastrointestinal tract. *E. coli* is a bacteria that are found in the digestive tracts of humans and many animals. Usually, these bacteria are harmless and may even be beneficial. Not all of the *E. coli* bacteria are alike and, a few may produce infection, such as *E. coli* 0157:H7.

Who gets STEC Infection?

Anyone can get *E. coli* infection. Young children and the elderly are most often affected by complications of the infection.

What are the symptoms of STEC Infection?

The symptoms of shiga-toxin producing *E. coli* include severe bloody diarrhea and abdominal pain. Sometimes the infection causes non-bloody diarrhea. Usually, little or no fever is present. In some cases, there are no symptoms at all.

How is Shiga-toxin Producing *E. Coli* Infection spread?

The bacteria that causes this disease can be spread in several ways:

- Eating meat, especially ground beef that is undercooked. The contaminated meat looks and smells normal.
- Consumption of sprouts, lettuce, salami, unpasteurized milk and juice contaminated with the bacteria.
- Swimming in or drinking sewerage contaminated water.
- Direct per-to-person spread through the feces of an infected individual. This occurs when hygiene and handwashing practices are inadequate
- Handling animals or pets that are contaminated with this bacteria

Is a person with STEC Infection contagious?

Yes, the person is contagious as long as these bacteria can be found in their stool. If you are infected with this disease you can spread it to others if you are not washing your hands properly.

How is Shiga-toxin Producing *E. Coli* Infection treated?

Most persons recover from this infection without antibiotics or other specific treatment. Anti-diarrheal drugs should be avoided.

Should a person with Shiga-toxin Producing *E. Coli* Infection be excluded from work or school?

People with active diarrhea who are unable to control their bowel movements (infants, young children, certain handicapped individuals, etc.) should be excluded from

settings such as day care or group activities where they may present a risk to others. Most infected people may return to work or school when their stools become formed provided that they carefully wash their hands after using the bathroom. Food handlers, health-care providers, and children in day care must obtain approval of the DC Department of Health before returning to work or school.

Can Shiga-toxin Producing *E. Coli* Infection be prevented?

The following steps will decrease your risk of contracting or spreading this infection:

- Cook all ground beef and hamburger thoroughly to a temperature of 160 degrees F.
- If you are served an undercooked hamburger or other ground beef product in a restaurant, send it back for additional cooking. Request that the item be placed on a new bun and a clean plate.
- Avoid spreading harmful bacteria in the kitchen by keeping raw meat separate from ready-to-eat foods, washing hands, counters, and utensils with hot soapy water after they touch raw meat, never place cooked meat on an unwashed plate used to hold raw meat, wash meat thermometer in between tests of meat that require further cooking.
- Wash fruits and vegetables thoroughly, especially those that will not be cooked.
- Drink or eat only pasteurized products.
- Drink only municipal water that has been treated.
- Avoid swallowing or drinking lake or pool water while swimming.
- Frequent hand washing with soap especially before and after preparing food or beverages, after using the bathroom, and after changing diapers;
- Monitoring children's hand washing before meals and after using the bathroom;
- Dispose of soiled diapers properly
- Persons with diarrheal illness should not prepare food for others
- Wash your hand thoroughly after handling or petting any animals

Want more information?

Information about *E. coli* and other related health topics can be found at the website www.cdc.gov. The DC Department of Health promotes the health and safety of the District residents. For additional information, please call (202) 442-9371.

