

WHAT IS E.COLI O157?



E.coli O157 is a form of food poisoning caused by a particularly dangerous type of bacteria, which typically results in diarrhoea and abdominal pain. It can also result in severe complications, including kidney failure, that in a very small number of cases can be life threatening.

How did I get it?

From any of the following sources:

- After handling raw meat (especially beef), if hands, surfaces and equipment are not cleaned and disinfected effectively before preparing or eating other foods
- From eating undercooked meat or poultry, (especially minced meat products)
- From cross contamination of uncooked meat with ready to eat foods
- From eating unwashed, raw vegetables and fruit
- Consuming unpasteurised milk or dairy products.
- Drinking un-treated water.

- From direct contact with infected animals, or contact with animal faeces, particularly on farms or in the countryside.
- Swimming or playing in untreated water such as ponds or streams
- From close contact with a person who is infected with E.coli O157.

When did I get it?

The illness usually occurs within 3 - 4 days of infection, but can sometimes take longer to develop. Symptoms can last up to two weeks in those without complications.

What are the signs and symptoms?

Symptoms range from mild to severe including:

- Diarrhoea which may be bloody, If blood is present immediate medical attention is required.
- Abdominal pain (stomach cramps)
- Fever
- Headaches, nausea, and vomiting.
- In some people, particularly children and the elderly (over 65), complications can lead to Haemolytic Uraemic Syndrome (HUS) which is associated with anaemia, kidney failure and bleeding.
- Symptoms of HUS and other complications can include: drowsiness, restlessness, passing less urine/dry nappies, (occasionally excess urine), blood in the

urine, small unexplained bruises, pale blotchy skin.

- In a small number of cases E.coli O157 infection can be life threatening.
- Symptoms normally persist for about 2 weeks, but severe complications, such as those affecting the kidneys, can last much longer.
- Most people rid themselves of the bacteria after about 1 week, but some people, particularly children, may carry E.coli O157 for months after recovery.

How do I stop it spreading in the home?

- Wash hands thoroughly using liquid soap and warm running water:
 - after going to the toilet
 - whenever they are visibly dirty
 - after cleaning soiled materials
 - after changing babies nappies
 - and always before preparing, serving or eating meals.
- Young children should have their hands washed for them or be supervised.
- Avoid sharing towels or nappy changing mats.
- Immediately clean areas that have been soiled using hot water and detergent and wearing rubber gloves. After thoroughly cleaning the area, where possible use a bleach based product to disinfect.
- Disinfect all areas in the toilet frequently throughout the day (including door and toilet flush handles, light switches etc.) using a bleach based product.

- Toys or other similar articles should not be shared between infected and non-infected children.

How do I stop it spreading outside the home?

The length of time people are excluded from their normal activities will depend on whether they are classed as at increased risk of spreading E.coli O157 to other people.

- Infected persons should not attend work or school until 48 hours after their first normal stool, unless further exclusion is advised by Environmental Health Officers.
Certain groups of people are classed as at increased risk of spreading E.coli O157 to other people. They will be asked by Environmental Health not to return to work, institutional settings, school or nursery until screening of their faeces shows that they no longer contain E.coli O157 bacteria. Occasionally some people, especially children, continue to produce faeces containing E.coli
- O157, even if the diarrhoea has stopped. This can continue for several weeks during which time they remain infectious to others.

This includes:

- Infected people who work in the food industry, or health and social care settings

- People who work in the above industries who have had close contact with an infected person
- Children under the age of 5 years who are infected or who have had close contact with an infected person
- People (infected with E.coli O157 or who have had close contact with an infected person) who do not have access to adequate hand washing facilities at school or work, or who are not able to use those facilities effectively (including those in infant school).

- Swimming should be avoided until at least 48 hours after the first normal stool. Those aged 5 years or less, or those who are not able to use hand washing facilities effectively should avoid swimming until they are advised by the Environmental Health Officers that it is safe.
- Infected persons should not travel or visit places where lots of people come together, particularly where there are shared facilities such as toilets.

Where can I get more advice?

- Your own doctor (GP) will be able to advise upon individual patient health care.
- NHS Direct Wales (0845 46 47)
- The investigating officer will also provide you with a more general leaflet on infection control and may be contacted on the number below for further advice if it is required.

For further advice contact:

**Merthyr Tydfil County Borough Council
Public Health Department
Civic Centre
Castle Street
Merthyr Tydfil
CF47 8AN**

Contact Numbers:

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