

E. Coli

What is E. coli?

E. coli is a common type of bacteria that lives in the intestines of people and animals. It helps your body break down and digest the food you eat. Most types, or strains, of E. coli are harmless. Other strains can make you sick.

Will I get sick after being exposed to E. coli?

Most people who are exposed to E. coli do not get sick. If you do get sick, it can happen within one to ten days of being exposed.

What are the symptoms of E. coli?

The most common early symptoms are very painful lower stomach cramps, vomiting, fever that doesn't last long and restlessness. This is followed by diarrhea that may have blood in it.

When should I see my doctor?

If you or your child has very painful stomach cramps, bloody diarrhea or diarrhea with a fever and vomiting, call or see your doctor right away.

How will my doctor know it is E. coli?

Your doctor will run some tests on your blood and your stool (poop) to see if you have a harmful type of E. coli in your body.

How is E. coli treated?

If you think your child has E. coli, do not give medicines to your child, including over-the-counter medicines, unless your doctor tells you to. Some medicines, like anti-diarrhea medicines, can allow E. coli to stay in your body longer. Some people, especially children under age 10 and adults over 60 years, have worse symptoms and may need to be treated in a hospital.

If my child has E. coli, when can they go back to day care or school?

Most children with E. coli get rid of this germ within two weeks after their diarrhea started. Most health departments require one or more negative stool cultures before a child can return to school or day care. Ask your doctor when your child can return.

How is E. coli spread?

You can get E. coli from:

- Undercooked, raw or non-pasteurized food or beverages.
- Another person who carries E. coli in their body. If you touch anything that has come in contact with their stool and then touch your mouth (or anything that comes in contact with your mouth), you could get sick.
- Swallowing water from an ocean, lake or pool.

How can I protect myself and my family from being infected?

- Cook meat thoroughly until there is no pink and the juices run clear. Try using a meat thermometer and cook roasts to at least 145°F, pork to 160°F, ground poultry to 165°F and other ground meat to at least 155°F.
- Drink only pasteurized beverages.
- Wash your hands well with soap and water after using the bathroom, changing diapers or before preparing and eating food. Correct hand washing involves soap, water and rubbing your hands, in three key steps:
 1. Wash with soap and water, rubbing your hands together quickly for at least 10 seconds.
 2. Rinse completely by rubbing your hands together.
 3. Dry your hands well. Wet hands help bacteria grow.
- Avoid sharing bath water with someone who has E. coli.

FOR MORE INFORMATION

- Children's Resource Line (206) 987-2500 or (866) 987-2500 toll-free Washington, Alaska, Montana, Idaho
- Your Child's Health Care Provider

Children's will make this information available in alternate formats upon request. Please call Marketing Communications at (206) 987-5205.

This handout has been reviewed by clinical staff at Children's Hospital. However, your child's needs are unique. Before you act or rely upon this information, please talk with your child's health care provider.