

# E. Coli



## WHAT IS E. COLI?

“E. Coli” refers to a specific group of bacteria. Though human and animal intestines normally contain certain types of harmless E. Coli bacteria, exposure to some strains can cause severe illness in humans (called E. Coli poisoning). There are six identified strains of E. Coli known to cause illness in humans. The most commonly reported strain is termed “Shiga toxin-producing E. Coli,” abbreviated as “STEC.”



## HOW IS E. COLI CONTRACTED?

Though E. Coli does not make animals sick, a main source of E. Coli infection in humans is derived from animals, especially cattle. One can become infected merely by handling cattle or other animals, such as in an animal farming operation or petting zoo. E. Coli is especially prevalent in undercooked hamburger meat. Ground meat is prone to contamination while being processed, as the meat may become infected with the animal’s intestines or feces during slaughterhouse processing.



## RECOVERY AND LONG-TERM EFFECTS

Most infected individuals recover without medical attention, as symptoms can often be successfully treated with increased hydration and rest. Treatment with anti-diarrheal medicines should be avoided, as these medicines hinder the intestinal tract’s ability to eliminate the bacteria. To add, antibiotics should not be taken, as they have been found to be ineffective and could actually have an adverse effect. Most infected persons recover in about one week from E. Coli poisoning.



## SYMPTOMS

People usually get sick from STEC (Shiga toxin-producing E. coli) 2-8 days (average of 3-4 days) after swallowing the organism (germ). Most people infected with STEC develop diarrhea (often bloody) and abdominal cramps. Most people recover within a week. Some illnesses last longer and can be more severe, resulting in a type of kidney failure called hemolytic uremic syndrome (HUS). Symptoms of HUS can include fever, abdominal pain, pale skin tone, fatigue and irritability, small, unexplained bruises or bleeding from the nose and mouth, and decreased urination.



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