

Escherichia Coli (E Coli)

E. coli is a type of bacteria that naturally exists in the intestines of humans and animals as part of the normal bowel environment. There are a number of different types of E. coli and while the majority are harmless, some can cause toxins leading to serious food poisoning. These toxins produced have the potential to cause severe, bloody diarrhoea, which may in some cases result in an acute kidney failure requiring intensive care.

Transmission of E Coli which causes toxins mainly occurs through eating or handling contaminated food and contact with infected animals. Further person-to-person transmission is possible among close contacts (families, childcare centres, nursing homes, etc).

There are some simple precautions that can be applied to reduce the risk of getting ill from potentially contaminated food items, animals or another ill person.

Personal hand hygiene

Wash your hands properly with soap, rinse carefully and dry using disposable kitchen towel or a textile towel (to be washed regularly at 60°C):

- before preparing, serving, or eating food
- after handling food, particularly raw vegetables, roots or meat
- after using the toilet or changing nappies
- after contact with farm animals or after visiting a farm
- after any contact with faeces from household pets

Food handling

- Anyone with diarrhoea or vomiting should restrain from handling food
- Meat, including minced meat, should be thoroughly cooked
- All fruits with skin should be peeled and then rinsed under running water
- All vegetables should be washed properly under running water
- Peel all root vegetables and rinse them under running potable water
- Thorough cooking of vegetables and meat destroys disease causing bacteria and viruses
- Avoid cross contamination i.e. spreading bacteria from a raw food item to cooked food item, by separating foods in the fridge and using separate cutting boards for raw meat and cooked meat or fresh vegetables.

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What to do if symptoms develop?

For general food poisoning (from any type of bacteria), medical attention should be sought if:

- vomiting lasts for more than two days
- it is not possible to keep liquids down for more than a day
- diarrhoea lasts for more than three days
- there is blood in the vomit or stools
- seizures, fits, slurred speech or double vision are experienced
- dehydration occurs (symptoms include dry mouth, sunken eyes and being unable to pass urine)

For further information:

<http://ecdc.europa.eu/en/Pages/home.aspx>

<http://www.nhs.uk/Pages/HomePage.aspx>

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