

E. coli
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Escherichia coli, commonly referred to as E. coli, has been in the news recently and several people have asked me how to decrease their chances of being infected.

What Are The Signs and Symptoms of E. coli?

Sometimes E. coli causes non-bloody diarrhea or has no symptoms. Generally the infected person will develop severe, bloody diarrhea and abdominal cramps 2 – 8 days after being infected. There is usually little or no fever present, and the illness goes away in 5 – 10 days. However, in some persons, especially those under 5 and the elderly, E. coli causes hemolytic uremic syndrome or HUS, which leads to kidney failure. HUS occurs in 8% of those persons who have symptoms severe enough to seek medical treatment. The death rate for patients with HUS is 3 – 5%.

What Are The Causes of E. coli?

- 1. Eating undercooked, contaminated ground beef is the most common route of infection.**
- 2. Eating undercooked, contaminated deer, goats and sheep.**
- 3. Salami has also been shown as a route of infection.**
- 4. E. coli is commonly found in petting zoos and on most cattle farms.**
- 5. Eating contaminated bean sprouts or fresh leafy vegetables such as lettuce and spinach.**
- 6. Person to person contact in families and child care centers, if handwashing habits are inadequate.**
- 7. Drinking raw milk or juice.**
- 8. Swimming in or drinking sewage-contaminated water.**

How Can You Decrease The Risk of Developing E. coli?

- 1. Thoroughly cook ground beef, deer, goats and sheep.**
- 2. Thoroughly wash your hands after coming in contact with cattle, deer, goats and sheep.**
- 3. Thoroughly wash fresh leafy vegetables.**
- 4. Thoroughly wash your hands, counter and utensils after they come in contact with raw meat.**
- 5. Thoroughly wash your hand after using the restroom and before eating. Teach your children proper handwashing techniques.**
- 5. Do not drink unpasteurized milk, juice and cider.**
- 6. Avoid swallowing lake or pool water when swimming.**
- 7. Pay close attention to public service announcements that will advise of foods to avoid in the event of an outbreak of E. coli.**

Information for this article was obtained from the CDC/Centers for Disease Control and Prevention at www.cdc.gov.