

## Public Health Fact Sheet

# Shiga Toxin-producing *E. coli* (STEC)

### What is STEC?

- *Escherichia coli* (*E. coli*) are bacteria that normally live in the intestines of humans and animals such as cows. Most strains of the *E. coli* bacteria do not cause illness.
- Some strains of *E. coli* produce a toxin called Shiga toxin that causes diarrhea and can lead to serious illness. These Shiga toxin-producing *E. coli* are sometimes called STEC (pronounced "S-TECK").

### What are the symptoms of STEC?

- Typical symptoms include severe abdominal cramping, sudden onset of watery diarrhea, and sometimes vomiting and a low-grade fever. The diarrhea is often bloody.
- Symptoms may occur from one to eight days after exposure and generally last one to three days.
- In some people STEC may cause a serious type of kidney disease called Hemolytic Uremic Syndrome (HUS). Children under age 5 and the elderly are most at risk for HUS.

### How is STEC spread?

- STEC has been associated with eating undercooked beef (especially ground beef), unpasteurized milk, unpasteurized apple juice, contaminated water, lettuce and alfalfa sprouts.
- The germ has also been found in poultry, pork and lamb.
- STEC can be spread when infected people do not wash their hands thoroughly after using the bathroom, or when someone helping to care for their diarrhea illness does not wash their hands thoroughly.

### What should I do if I think I have STEC?

- Consult your doctor or health care provider.
- Do not send your children to child care or school if they have diarrhea.
- Do not go to work if you have diarrhea, especially if you are a health care worker, food handler or child care provider.
- Do not prepare food for others while you have diarrhea and for at least 48 hours after your diarrhea resolves.
- Wash your hands thoroughly after using the bathroom.

### How is STEC diagnosed?

- Many different illnesses can cause diarrhea or abdominal cramps. Laboratory testing of stool is necessary to diagnose STEC.

### How is STEC treated?

- Most people with mild STEC recover on their own.
- For mild illness, antibiotics have **not** been shown to shorten the duration of the symptoms and may make the illness more severe in some people.
- Severe complications, such as damage to the kidneys, may require hospitalization.
- Your doctor and Public Health may recommend that you stay home from work, school or child care while you have diarrhea.

### How do you prevent STEC?

- Cook meats and poultry thoroughly. Ground beef should reach at least 155° F (until meat is no longer pink and juices run clear).
- Do not consume raw milk or unpasteurized dairy products.
- Wash your hands after using the bathroom or changing diapers, and before preparing or eating food.

**More information about STEC:** [http://www.cdc.gov/nczved/divisions/dfbmd/diseases/ecoli\\_o157h7/](http://www.cdc.gov/nczved/divisions/dfbmd/diseases/ecoli_o157h7/)

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