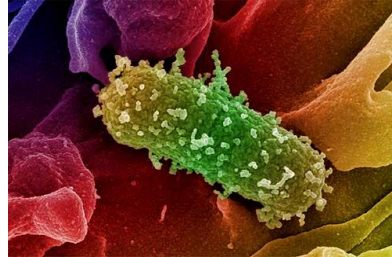




Food safety advice

E.COLI ADVICE FOR CATERERS



What is Ecoli?

E.coli is a bacteria (*Escherichia coli*) that naturally inhabits the large intestine of all humans and most warm blooded animals (Mammals and birds). Most E.coli are harmless but some types of E.coli can cause diseases. Certain strains of the bacteria known as VTEC/STEC strains produce a potent toxin which causes a diarrheal illness, it is particularly dangerous to vulnerable groups such as children and the elderly.



What are the symptoms?

The incubation period, which is the time between swallowing the bacteria until the first symptoms appear, is usually 2 to 7 days, although it can be as short as 1 day and as long as 14 days.

When the patient becomes unwell it is usually with stomach cramps, fever and diarrhoea. The illness may clear at this stage but occasionally the disease progresses to the next stage where the diarrhoea becomes bloody. A small number of people may then go on to develop complications such as kidney damage and disorders of blood clotting; which require urgent hospital treatment.

The vast majority of people make a full and complete recovery but the illness can cause ongoing health problems and can be fatal.



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How does E.coli infection occur?

The main source of the strains that affect humans is from farm animals. Infection with the bacteria usually occurs through consumption of contaminated food or water or through contact with infected animals or their faeces.



What can you do to prevent E.coli infection?

- Ensure that raw meat and ready to eat foods are kept completely separate. Raw meat must be stored away from cooked food and other ready to eat foods such as salads. Either store it in a separate fridge or at the bottom of the fridge where it cannot contaminate other foods.
- Ensure that raw meat is prepared in an area away from where ready to eat food is handled/prepared. Ideally raw meat should be prepared in a separate area but where this is not possible you must ensure that the area is thoroughly cleaned and sanitised between uses. Separate or disposable cleaning cloths should be used.
- Use separate chopping boards, knives/utensils for preparing the raw meat and other ready to eat foods. Don't forget raw meat includes bacon, burgers and sausages too.
- Ensure that all staff observe good personal hygiene and wash their hands thoroughly with soap and hot water after handling raw meat, dirty vegetables etc. and after using the toilet.
- Avoid using/selling unpasteurised milk, or cheese that has been made from unpasteurised milk.



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- Avoid using/serving unwashed, unpeeled vegetables or fruit. Thoroughly wash all salads, vegetables and fruit and peel where possible, this is particularly important for those which are covered in soil that could be contaminated with bacteria.
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- Ensure that fresh produce such as bagged salads, prepared fruit etc. are stored in the fridge.
- Ensure that meat is thoroughly cooked to a core temperature of at least 75°C. There should be no pink/red inside and the juices should run clear. Food made with minced meat such as beef burgers is particularly risky and should never be served rare.
- Avoid contact with farm animals and ensure good personal hygiene (hand washing etc) after touching any animals including domestic animals such as dogs or cats and other pets.
- Any staff who handle food that have been unwell with sickness/diarrhoea must not be allowed to come to work. They must remain off work for at least a further 48 hours after their symptoms have stopped. Staff that have been suffering from E.coli food poisoning must be excluded and cannot return to work until they have had clearance (two negative faecal specimen results).

