

Confidential
To Parents & Carers

Date 12 August 2022
Our Ref HPT/RO/fs
Enquiries to Health Protection Team
Direct Line 0300 790 6264
Email health.protection@nhslothian.scot.nhs.uk

Dear Parents & Carers

E. COLI O157 INFORMATION

Investigations into the cluster of cases of E-coli at Church Road Pear Tree Nursery in Haddington, East Lothian are continuing.

As you will already know, following our last letter, NHS Lothian is investigating the cluster and has created a multi-agency Incident Management Team (IMT) to help control and manage the situation. The team is made up of a number of organisations, including the NHS Lothian Health Protection Team, Public Health Scotland, East Lothian Council Environmental Health Department and the Care Inspectorate. They are working to identify cases, prevent further spread of the infection and put in place robust control measures to safeguard public health and are working collaboratively with the nursery.

There are a total of 26 cases to date. Although most cases have had mild symptoms and have not required hospital treatment, a small number of confirmed cases have been admitted to hospital. Some of these have been admitted as a precaution and all are in a stable condition.

Work to establish a source of the infection is ongoing. The IMT has decided that the nursery should remain closed to allow the investigations to continue.

We know this is an anxious time for all of the families and individuals affected by this cluster, but we would reassure you that control measures, such as the continuing closure of the nursery, are essential.

E.coli O157 is usually a mild infection, but can be severe in some cases and therefore Public Health action is required.

If your child has experienced any of the symptoms outlined below since the 15th of July, even if they have resolved and you have not been in contact with the NHS Lothian Health Protection Team, it is important that you call the number at the end of this letter as soon as possible.

The Health Protection Team will contact you once stool results are available and exclusion can be lifted. This will depend on the specific circumstances for child and family, and will sometimes require additional samples. Please wait for the Health Protection Team to contact you and do not contact your GP to ask for results.

It is really important that any child who has been excluded from the nursery and is due to start primary school next week, does not attend until the exclusion period is complete. This is a precautionary measure to help protect other people in the local community.

Should you have any questions about nursery fees or require any similar information, please contact Pear Tree directly on office@peartreenurseries.co.uk

What to look out for

E.coli O157 infection can cause symptoms ranging from mild diarrhoea to severe bloody diarrhoea. There may also be fever, abdominal pain and vomiting. While the complications of E.coli infection are rare, they include anaemia and kidney problems which can be serious, particularly in children and adults over 65 years.

If you, or / your child, develop symptoms of diarrhoea with or without stomach cramps, vomiting or fever, you should contact your GP (or NHS 24 on 111). It is particularly important for anyone who has bloody diarrhoea to seek immediate emergency medical attention, particularly young children and adults over 65 years. Please take this letter with you if you need to visit either your GP or seek other medical attention.

Careful hand-washing before eating or preparing food and after going to the toilet is very important in order to limit the risk of spread of any diarrhoeal illness. In addition, any person who has symptoms should stay off work/school/nursery. Children should also stay off any other pre-school care facilities (playgroups, soft play etc). They should only return when they have had no symptoms for a period of at least 48 hours and, in the case of E.coli O157, until they are shown to be free from infection via clearance testing.

I attach an information leaflet on E.coli infection. If you require further information, the NHS Lothian Health Protection Team can be contacted on 0330 790 6264 during office hours 8am – 6:30pm daily.

Yours faithfully



Dr Richard Othieno
Consultant in Public Health Medicine

Escherichia.coli (E.coli) O157 and Toxin Producing E.coli Factsheet

What is E.coli O157?

E.coli are bacteria (germs) that we all carry in our gut, usually without any harm. However a few strains, including E.coli O157, can produce toxins (poisons) that can lead to serious illness.

The main source of E.coli O157 are animals (particularly cattle), and the bacteria can spread to humans via contaminated meat, and less frequently, dairy products. E.coli O157 can cause diarrhoea ranging from mild diarrhoea of short duration to severe bloody diarrhoea with fever, abdominal pain and lack of energy. Serious complications can include anaemia and kidney problems including Haemolytic Uraemic Syndrome, which may require hospital treatment.

The incubation period (time taken from swallowing the bacteria until illness starts) is usually 3 – 4 days but can be 2 – 10 days.

The infectious period (the period when the infection can be passed from person to person) for E.coli O157 is not clear, but it is known to be longer in young children (at least 3 weeks).

Who can it affect?

ANYONE – but it is most common in children under 5 years old and they are at greatest risk of developing kidney problems. The elderly are also at particular risk of serious infection.

How is E.coli O157 caught?

By eating raw and undercooked food (particularly beef, minced beef and venison), or by eating foods that have been in contact with these.

By eating foods that have been contaminated with animal faeces (particularly farm animals). e.g. unwashed vegetables.

By drinking un-pasteurised contaminated milk. Also drinking untreated water.

By not washing hands after touching infected animals (particularly farm animals). This can be a particular problem when children have direct contact with farm animals e.g. at farm visitor centres.

Person to person spread can occur particularly in families, nurseries or day care centres. This happens by swallowing E.coli O157 germs which have been passed from the bowel of the person who is carrying E.coli O157. It can be passed on unwashed hands and by touching surfaces they have contaminated such as toilet flush handles, door handles, taps, etc. E.coli O157 is very infectious and only a small number of bacteria are needed to cause illness.

Do you need to stay off work or school if you get E.coli O157?

Risk Groups

Young children (pre school and infants), and people in certain high-risk occupations such as food-handlers, health care workers and persons who are unable to be responsible for their own hand hygiene may be excluded from going to work and class by the local health protection team.

Contacts of a person who has E.coli O157 may also be excluded from work and class if they fall into the categories above.

If you are excluded by the health protection team you can only return to work when they tell you.

Non Risk Groups

You must stay off work until you have been completely free from any symptoms for 48 hours.

Children should not play with other children or attend school until they are fully recovered and have been symptom free for 48 hours.

How do you avoid catching it?

By thoroughly cooking all foods, especially meat, until piping hot. Take extra care with burgers and sausages that the juices run clear. Always check barbeque meat!
Always use separate utensils for raw and cooked meat.

Keep raw meat away from cooked foods and other ready to eat foods (foods that won't be cooked) e.g. salad, bread, cheese.

Wash fruit and vegetables well especially if they are to be eaten raw.

Clean work surfaces, dishes and utensils thoroughly in hot water and detergent after they have been used with raw meat.

Only drink pasteurised milk and avoid drinking untreated water.

Always wash hands thoroughly with soap and warm water and dry with a clean towel;

- after going to the toilet
- after changing a baby's nappy
- after contact with pets and animals
- before preparing and eating food
- after handling raw food

If on picnics with no water available to wash hands, use disposable travel wipes.

Keep pets away from food, dishes and worktops.

Take precautions during farm visits by children, particularly:

- Handwashing after touching animals and before eating
- Avoiding eating and drinking whilst visiting animals
- Keeping their faces away from animals
- Not touching animal droppings
- cleaning shoes after the visit

If you or a member of your household has E.coli O157:

Ensure you and all household members wash their hands thoroughly with warm water and soap;

- After using or cleaning the toilet
- After attending to another person who has diarrhoea / vomiting
- After changing a baby's nappy
- After handling or washing soiled clothes and bedding
- Before eating or preparing food

Ensure each person affected has their own towel for drying hands.

Ensure young children are supervised when washing hands, or have their hands washed for them.

Wash soiled clothes, bedding and towels on a hot cycle of the washing machine.

Keep soiled washing separate from the rest of the washing.

Clean toilet seats, flush handles and taps frequently with hot soapy water. The toilet bowl should be cleaned with a toilet brush and disinfectant. Wear rubber gloves to clean the toilet and keep them for this use only.

Where possible stay away from other people until your symptoms have stopped, especially vulnerable people like the elderly and very young. Where possible, do not prepare food for your family or anyone else.

Do not go swimming until 2 weeks after your symptoms have ceased. If you have been excluded then do not go swimming until able to return to work or school/nursery.

If you have any further queries you can contact the Health Protection Team, Directorate of Public Health, Lothian NHS Board on 0300 790 6264 between 9am and 5pm, Monday to Friday.

Further information on handwashing can be found at:

<http://www.washyourhandsofthem.com/home.aspx>

A leaflet is also available on Simple precautions for reducing the risk of E.coli O157 infection in rural families and visitors. This can be accessed at:

<http://www.documents.hps.scot.nhs.uk/giz/ecoli/simple-precautions-O157.pdf>