

To Parents and Guardians
Pear Tree Nursery
32 Meadowpark
Haddington
EH41 4DS

Date 19 August 2022
Our Ref HPT/GM
Enquiries to Health Protection
Direct Line 0300 790 6264
Email: Health.Protection@nhsllothian.scot.nhs.uk

Dear Parents & Guardians

E. COLI O157 INFORMATION

NHS Lothian Health Protection Team have been made aware of a small number of cases of E.coli O157 infection at the Pear Tree Nursery, Meadowpark. There are also reports of people at the nursery who have been affected by diarrhoea in the past few weeks. We are working with the nursery and the East Lothian Environmental Health Department to investigate the situation.

E.coli O157 is rare but can cause infection which can sometimes lead to very serious illness in young children. Most people will however fully recover without any lasting damage. For this reason we are taking public health action.

As part of our control measures we are requesting that **all children and staff** at Pear Tree Nursery Meadowpark submit two different stool (poo) samples, collected at least 24 hours apart, as soon as possible, to ensure they are not carrying the infection. This includes children who have left the nursery since 15 July 2022. The special containers needed for this can be obtained from your local GP surgery. These two separate stool samples, collected at least 24 hours apart, must be marked "sample 1" and "sample 2", with name, date of birth and date and time of collection written on the label. The samples can be left at your GP surgery for transporting to the laboratory for testing. The tests will take up to a week to process and when we have the results we will contact you by telephone.

Public Health are also requesting all children and staff who have been at the nursery since 15 July 2022 to stay at home until both their sample results are negative. This is called an exclusion order, and this will be sent out to you in the post.

If your child has any symptoms outlined below since 15 July 2022, even if they have resolved, it is important that you call the NHS Lothian Health Protection Team on the number at the end of this letter as soon as possible.

What to look out for

E.coli O157 infection symptoms can range from:

- Mild diarrhoea
- Fever
- Abdominal pain
- Severe bloody diarrhoea
- Vomiting

While the complications of *E.coli* infection are rare, they include anaemia and kidney problems which can be serious in children and adults over 65 years.

If you/ 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.

I attach an information leaflet on *E.coli* infection. If you require further information or your child have had symptoms of *E.coli* infection since 15 July 2022, the NHS Lothian Health Protection Team can be contacted on **0300 790 6264** during office hours 8am – 6:30pm daily.

Yours faithfully



Dr Graham Mackenzie
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 8am and 6.30pm, 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>