

This letter was sent to parents/ carers of children who had attended a party

Date 02nd September 2022
Our Ref HPT/RO
Enquiries to Health Protection
Direct Line 0300 790 6264
Email: Health.Protection@nhslothian.scot.nhs.uk

Dear Parent / Guardian

E. COLI INFORMATION

I am writing to inform you that you have been identified as a possible contact of an individual diagnosed with an *E.coli* infection. The chances that you have acquired the infection from them has been assessed to be low.

However, as a precaution, I am writing to make you aware of symptoms and signs to look out for in case you should become unwell.

What to look out for

E.coli infection can cause symptoms ranging from mild diarrhoea (with or without fever, abdominal pain or vomiting) to severe bloody diarrhoea. The complications of *E.coli* infection include anaemia and kidney problems which can be very serious in children and adults over 65 years.

People can become infected with *E.coli* infection in the environment through contact with infected animals either directly or through inadvertent contact with animal faeces (e.g. at farms, petting farms and campsites). People can also become infected with *E.coli* by eating undercooked or contaminated food. *E.coli* infection can be passed on from an infected person via unwashed hands or by touching contaminated surfaces such as toilet flush handles, door handles and taps. *E.coli* is very infectious and only a small number of bacteria are needed to cause illness.

If you develop symptoms of diarrhoea with or without stomach cramps, vomiting or fever, you should contact your GP (or NHS 24 on 111) and obtain a stool specimen pot to test for *E. Coli*. 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.

If you or a member of the family experience symptoms, 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.

Careful handwashing before eating or preparing food and after going to the toilet is very important to limit the risk of spread of any diarrhoeal illness. In addition, any person who has symptoms should stay off work. They should not return to work until they have had no symptoms for a period of at least 48 hours, or until they are told they can return by their doctor.

I attach an information leaflet on *E.coli* infection. If you require further information or have experienced symptoms of *E.coli* infection, the NHS Lothian Health Protection Team can be contacted on **0300 790 6264** during office hours 9:30am – 6:00pm daily.

Yours faithfully

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Dr R. Othieno', written over a light blue rectangular background.

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 0131 465 5420 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>