



Shiga toxin-producing *E. coli* (STEC) Fact Sheet

What is STEC?

STEC is a type of *E. coli* bacteria that is known to cause gastrointestinal disease. *E. coli* are bacteria that normally live in the gut of humans and animals. There are many different types of *E. coli*, including STEC and other kinds. STEC are particularly important because they have been associated with big outbreaks, and because they produce a toxin that can make people sick.

Who is at risk to get STEC infections?

Anyone can get infected with STEC. Young children and the elderly are more likely to suffer the serious complication of STEC infection called hemolytic-uremic syndrome, or HUS.

How is STEC spread?

STEC can live in the guts of animals, and food, drinks, hands, and surfaces can become contaminated with STEC from the animals' feces. When a person ingests the STEC, they can become sick.

What are the symptoms of STEC infection?

Symptoms will vary between people, but common symptoms include diarrhea, vomiting, and stomach cramps. In some cases, STEC patients may get a very serious complication of the infection called hemolytic-uremic syndrome (HUS). HUS causes serious kidney problems, and may be fatal. Warning signs of HUS include less frequent urination, feeling very tired, and losing pink color in the cheeks.

How soon after exposure do symptoms appear?

Usually, symptoms appear 3-4 days after the exposure to the bacteria. However, the incubation period may be as short as 1 day and as long as 10.

How is this disease diagnosed?

Lab tests are done on stool specimens to identify STEC. Additional testing is done by public health labs to characterize the strain of STEC, which helps with outbreak identification and tracking.

What is the treatment for STEC infection?

Supportive therapy, like staying hydrated, is beneficial. It is NOT recommended to give antibiotics to people with STEC, because this can increase the risk of HUS.

What can be done to prevent the spread of this disease?

- WASH YOUR HANDS thoroughly after using the bathroom, changing diapers, or before preparing food. Wash your hands after contact with animals or their environments.
- Cook meats thoroughly.
- Avoid cross-contamination while cooking and preparing food. Thoroughly wash hands, counters, cutting boards, knives, and utensils after they touch raw meats.
- Do not consume raw milk, unpasteurized dairy products, and unpasteurized juices.
- Avoid swallowing water when swimming or playing in lakes, streams, pools, and kiddie pools.
- People who work in food service, healthcare, or child care should stay home from work until they have no episodes of diarrhea for 24 hours, antibiotics have been taken for 48 hours, and two stool cultures collected at least 24 hours apart have both tested negative.