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Family Physicians Advise on E. coli

(COLUMBUS, Ohio)— E. coli is a bacteria that causes severe cramps and diarrhea and is a leading cause of bloody diarrhea.

Symptoms start about seven days after you are infected, and are worse in children and older people and especially in people who have another illness. E. coli infection is more common during the summer months and in northern states.

“The most common source of E. coli infection is from undercooked ground beef, unpasteurized milk or contaminated drinking water,” said Ryan Kauffman, M.D., a family physician in Bellefontaine, Ohio. “Animals such as cattle or other people can also be the source of the bacteria.”

The bacteria can also be passed from person to person, particularly in daycare centers and nursing homes. If you have this infection and do not wash your hands well with soap after going to the bathroom, you can give the bacteria to other people when you touch things, especially food.

People who are infected with E. coli are very contagious. Children should not go to a daycare center until they have two negative stool cultures. Older people in nursing homes should stay in bed until two stool cultures are negative.

“E. coli infections start with severe abdominal cramps and watery diarrhea for a day and then becomes bloody diarrhea up to 10 or more times a day for two to five days,” stated Kauffman.

“Anytime someone has blood in their stool they need to see their family physician as soon as possible. E. coli and other intestinal infections can be diagnosed with stool cultures. For E. coli, it is best to have the stool culture done during the first two days of the bloody diarrhea,” said Kauffman.

According to Kauffman, there are no medicines or antibiotics that can be prescribed and you should not take medicine to stop diarrhea because it can interfere with the body’s ability to clear the infection. If you become severely dehydrated, you may have to be hospitalized for IV fluids.

The Ohio Academy of Family Physicians is a statewide professional association with more than 4,400 members, including practicing physicians, family medicine residents and medical students. The scope of family medicine encompasses all ages, both sexes and every disease entity. Family physicians provide comprehensive, continuing care to all members of the family.

FACT SHEET

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How You Can Get E. coli Infection

- Eating undercooked ground beef (the inside is pink)
- Drinking contaminated (impure) water
- Drinking unpasteurized (raw) milk
- Working with cattle

How You Can Keep From Getting E. coli Infection

- Wash your hands carefully with soap before you start cooking.
- Cook ground beef until you see no pink anywhere.
- Do not taste small bites of raw ground beef while you are cooking.
- Do not put cooked hamburgers on a plate that had raw ground beef on it before.
- Cook all hamburgers to at least 155°F. A meat thermometer can help you test your hamburgers.
- Defrost meats in the refrigerator or the microwave. Do not let meat sit on the counter to defrost.
- Keep raw meat and poultry separate from other foods. Use hot water and soap to wash cutting boards and dishes if raw meat and poultry have touched them.
- Do not drink raw milk.
- Keep food refrigerated or frozen.
- Keep hot food hot, and cold food cold.
- Refrigerate leftovers right away or throw them away.
- People with diarrhea should wash their hands carefully and often, using hot water and soap, and washing for at least 30 seconds. People who work in daycare centers and homes for the elderly should also wash their hands often.
- In restaurants, always order hamburgers that are cooked well done so that no pink shows.

Source: www.familydoctor.org