E. COLI

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(2011)

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IMPORTANT

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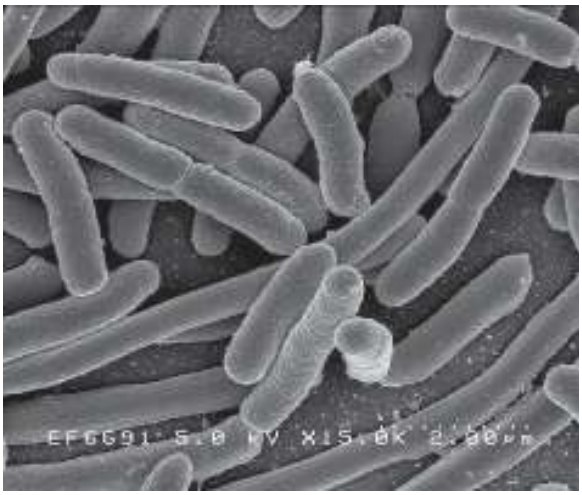
Introduction

"E. coli" is a contraction for Escherichia coli. This is a bacteria that causes severe cramps and diarrhoea (E. coli is a leading cause of bloody diarrhoea).



Most strains of E. coli form part of the normal intestinal microflora in humans and warm-blooded animals. However, some strains have the ability to cause disease in humans through the presence of specific virulence factors.

(Picture Right - E. coli as seen through an electron microscope)

The symptoms of E. coli are worse in children and older individuals, and are especially severe in people who have a concurrent illness.

Source

Most E. coli infections come from:

- Eating undercooked beef (the inside is still pink)
- Drinking unpasteurized milk
- Drinking contaminated or impure water - human and animal faeces may pollute ground and surface water, including streams, rivers, lakes and water used to irrigate crops. Although public water systems use chlorine, ultraviolet light or ozone to kill E. coli, some outbreaks

have been linked to contaminated municipal water supplies. Private wells are a greater cause for concern.

- Swimming - some individuals have been infected after swimming in pools or lakes contaminated with faeces
- Working with cattle - outbreaks have also occurred among children visiting petting zoos and in animal barns at county fairs
- Contaminated vegetables
- Restaurant meals - cooks or servers who don't wash their hands after using the bathroom can transmit E. coli bacteria to food
- Spread by infected persons

Healthy beef and dairy cattle may carry the E. coli bacterium in their intestines, and the meat can get contaminated during slaughtering and processing. Additionally, when beef is ground up (mince, hamburgers, beef sausages, etc.), the E. coli bacteria gets spread throughout the meat.

Also, vegetables that have come in contact with infected cattle manure can become carriers of the bacteria.

E. coli can also be passed from person to person. This is particularly true in day care centres, hospitals, and nursing homes. Poor hygiene after going to the toilet contributes to the bacteria being readily spread - especially where food is being prepared or handled. Consequently, individuals who are infected with E. coli are contagious.

However, the most common way to get this infection is by eating contaminated food - especially if the food has not cooked at a high enough temperature or if it is not cooked for long enough. Once contracted, the bacteria move into the stomach and intestines.

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Symptoms

1) Symptoms start approximately 7 days after the initial contact with the bacteria
2) The first sign is severe abdominal cramps of a sudden onset
3) Some people experience nausea and vomiting
4) After a few hours, watery diarrhoea appears
5) The diarrhoea causes rapid dehydration, which causes the individual to feel sick and tired - consequently ensure that plenty of suitable fluids are taken
6) The watery diarrhoea lasts for approximately 1 day
7) The diarrhoea then changes to bright red bloody stools - the infection has created lesions in the intestines, hence the bloody stools
8) The bloody diarrhoea now lasts for 2 to 5 days, and there can be 10 or more bowel movements a day. It has been said that the stools are "all blood and no stool"
9) From 3rd to 5th day the symptoms start to ease and recovery ensues

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Complications

Because of the blood loss there can be the complication of hemolytic anemia (a low red blood cell count), thrombocytopenia (which is a low platelet count), and renal failure.

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Risk Factors

Age - Young children and older adults are at higher risk of experiencing illness caused by E. coli and more-serious complications from the infection.

Weakened immune systems - People who have weakened immune systems (from AIDS or drugs to treat cancer or to prevent the rejection of organ transplants) are more likely to become seriously ill from ingesting E. coli.

Eating certain types of food - Riskier foods include undercooked hamburger and other beef products; unpasteurized milk, apple juice or cider; and soft cheeses made from raw milk.

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Treatment

There is no special allopathic treatment, except drinking lots of fluids, monitoring for complications, and just waiting for the bacteria to be flushed out.

Most cases of E. coli infection get better without treatment in 5 to 10 days.

Activated Charcoal

The best alternative treatment for E. coli is to take Activated Charcoal tabs or caps:

Take 8 x 260 mg Activated Charcoal tabs/caps with water, per hour, - repeat 8 x or until charcoal appears in the motions.

Then take 4 x 260 mg activated charcoal tabs/caps with water, 4 x daily until the condition is fully resolved. Ensure that there is charcoal in the stools until the condition is fully resolved - increase frequency of treatment if required.

Acidophilus

Acidophilus should be taken to replace the intestinal flora which has been disrupted because of the infection and diarrhoea.

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Prevention

To help avoid E. coli poisoning, and to prevent infection, it is important to handle food safely and to wash hands. Cook meat well, wash fruits and vegetables before eating or cooking them, and avoid unpasteurized milk and juices.

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Appendix

E. coli Meningitis

E. coli meningitis is caused by bacteria which grow in the bodies of healthy individuals. Usually these bacteria are harmless; however, but some uncommon strains can cause serious disease. The vast majority of cases of E. coli meningitis are caused by a disease-causing strain known as E. coli K1.

Most cases of E. coli meningitis occur in new-born babies or babies under 3 months of age. In general, adults and older children almost never get E coli meningitis unless they have health problems that suppress their immune system, or have had head injuries or surgery to the head so that bacteria can

enter via the head wound. However, E. coli meningitis may occur in individuals who have a CSF shunt (a device for draining excess fluid from around the brain to relieve pressure).

Infection in babies may occur during delivery, or from bacteria acquired in hospital, or in the home. Premature and low-birth-weight babies are at higher risk of contracting meningitis.

Infection by E. coli and similar bacteria tend to cause blood-poisoning (septicaemia) when it happens at birth or in the first two days after birth. When it occurs in babies more than 48 hours old it is more likely to cause meningitis.

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