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Page 1 of 2

Division of Public and Behavioral Health

NEWS RELEASE

Peak Season for E. Coli Outbreaks

Carson City – The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) just released a report showing that we are in the peak season for E. Coli outbreaks. Nearly half of the nation's E. coli 0157 outbreaks occur during July through September, with beef-associated outbreaks occurring most often in July and leafy vegetable-associated outbreaks in September. Waterborne disease outbreaks occurred most often during June and outbreaks associated with animal contact during August. E. coli can spread rapidly between states when a nationally distributed food product is contaminated. In recent years this occurred with ground beef, ready to eat salads, and sprouts.

Escherichia coli (abbreviated as E. coli) are bacteria found in the environment, foods, and intestines of people and animals. E. coli are a large and diverse group of bacteria. Most E. coli are harmless and an important part of a healthy human intestinal tract, but others can make you sick and cause diarrhea, urinary tract infections, respiratory illness and pneumonia, and other illnesses. One particular pathotype of E. coli causes disease by making a toxin called Shiga toxin. The bacteria that make these toxins are called "Shiga toxin-producing E. coli", or STEC. People usually get sick from STEC within 2 to 8 days after swallowing the organism. Most people develop diarrhea (often bloody) and abdominal cramps. Most illnesses resolve on their own within 7 days. Some illnesses last longer and can be more severe. E. coli (STEC) is the fifth most common pathogen contributing to domestically acquired foodborne illnesses resulting in hospitalization.

Each year, 1 in 6 Americans gets sick by consuming contaminated foods or beverages. In order to protect you and your family from harmful E. coli, the CDC recommends:

- Know your risk of food poisoning. People at higher risk for foodborne illness are pregnant women and newborns, children, older adults, and those with weak immune systems.
- Consult your healthcare provider if you think you might be ill with *E. coli* infection.
- Practice proper hygiene, especially good hand washing
 - Wash your hands thoroughly after using the bathroom, changing diapers, and before preparing or eating food.
 - Wash your hands after contact with animals or their environments (at farms, petting zoos, fairs, even your own backyard).
 - Always wash your hands before preparing and feeding bottles or foods to an infant, before touching an infant's mouth, and before touching pacifiers or other things that go into an infant's mouth.
 - Keep all objects that enter infants' mouths (such as pacifiers and teethingers) clean.
 - If soap and water aren't available, use an alcohol-based hand sanitizer. These alcohol-based products can quickly reduce the number of germs on hands in some situations, but they are not a substitute for washing with soap and running water.



A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Tracey Green MD".

Tracey D. Green, MD, Chief Medical Officer

- Follow clean, separate, cook, chill guidelines, which can be found at [FoodSafety.gov](http://www.foodsafety.gov)
- Cook meats thoroughly. Ground beef and meat that has been needle-tenderized should be cooked to a temperature of at least 160°F (70°C). Use a thermometer to verify the temperature, as color is not a very reliable indicator of how thoroughly meat has been cooked.
- Prevent cross-contamination in food preparation areas by thoroughly washing hands, counters, cutting boards, and utensils after they touch raw meat.
- Avoid consuming raw milk, unpasteurized dairy products, and unpasteurized juices (like fresh apple cider).
- Avoid swallowing water when swimming and when playing in lakes, ponds, streams, swimming pools, and backyard "kiddie" pools.

For a copy of the CDC report, please visit http://wwwnc.cdc.gov/eid/pdfs/vol21no8_pdf-version.pdf. For general information on E. coli, please visit the CDC website at: <http://www.cdc.gov/ecoli/index.html>.

For more information about the Division of Public and Behavioral Health, go to <http://dpbh.nv.gov/>.

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