

## Shiga toxin-producing *E. coli* (STEC) Infection

### WHAT ARE SHIGA TOXIN-PRODUCING *E. coli* (STEC)?

- ✓ *E. coli* are a common type of bacteria. Most *E. coli* are harmless to humans.
- ✓ Some strains of *E. coli* produce a toxin called Shiga toxin that causes diarrhea and can lead to severe illness. These Shiga toxin-producing *E. coli* are sometimes called STEC (pronounced “S-TECK”).
- ✓ Other types of *E. coli* can cause infections of the kidney, bladder, and other body sites.

### SYMPTOMS

- ✓ Diarrhea that usually lasts 5-7 days and often becomes bloody
- ✓ Stomach cramps
- ✓ Little or no fever
- ✓ Symptoms appear 1 to 8 days after exposure, usually within 2 to 4 days

### HOW IS STEC SPREAD?

- ✓ STEC can be spread from cattle and other animals to people through raw or undercooked meat, unpasteurized milk, or through contact with an infected animal..
- ✓ People can also get infected by consuming contaminated water, raw produce or unpasteurized juice or cider. Foods can become contaminated with bacteria from manure in the field or from raw beef or raw beef juices in the kitchen.
- ✓ People with STEC who do not wash hands well after a bowel movement can spread it to others.

### DIAGNOSIS AND TREATMENT

- ✓ STEC infection is diagnosed with a stool test.
- ✓ It is important to drink plenty of fluids to prevent dehydration.
- ✓ Antibiotics and anti-diarrhea medicines are typically not recommended because they may make the infection worse. .

Available in alternate formats.

### STEC CAN CAUSE HEMOLYTIC UREMIC SYNDROME (HUS)

- ✓ Hemolytic uremic syndrome (or HUS) is a serious complication of STEC infection that can damage the kidneys and other organs.
- ✓ Most people with STEC infection do not develop HUS.
- ✓ HUS is more common in young children and the elderly with STEC infections.

### PREVENTION

- ✓ Use a cooking thermometer when cooking ground beef (such as hamburgers). Make sure the temperature of the meat throughout reaches at least 155° F.
- ✓ Keep ready-to-eat foods away from raw meat.
- ✓ Wash hands, counters, and utensils with hot soapy water after they touch raw meat.
- ✓ Never place food on unwashed plates that held raw ground beef.
- ✓ If you are served pink hamburger in a restaurant, send it back for further cooking.
- ✓ Wash fruit and vegetables thoroughly under running water, especially those eaten raw.
- ✓ Drink only pasteurized (not raw) milk, juice and cider.
- ✓ Wash hands thoroughly using soap and warm water after handling raw meat, using the bathroom, helping a child in the bathroom, or changing diapers and before preparing or eating food.
- ✓ Teach children how and when to wash their hands.
- ✓ People with diarrhea should not swim in public pools or lakes, share baths, or prepare food for others.

**Report all King County cases to  
Public Health by calling (206) 296-4774.**