Shiga Toxin Producing *E. coli*  

Fact Sheet

There are hundreds of strains of *E. coli* and most strains do not make people sick. Some strains, including *E. coli* 0157:H7, produce a toxin called "Shiga toxin" that can make people sick (also called STEC).

*E. coli* live in the intestines of people and animals including cows, goats, sheep, deer, and elk. A major source for human illness is cows. STEC generally does not make animals sick.

Common Signs and Symptoms

- **Diarrhea**
- **Stomach Pain**
- **Nausea and Vomiting**
- **Fever**

Signs and symptoms usually start one to ten days after swallowing the bacteria and usually last five to seven days. Diarrhea can be bloody. People who only have diarrhea usually recover completely.

In some people, STEC can cause a complication called hemolytic uremic syndrome (HUS). Children under the age of five, women, and the elderly are most at risk for HUS. HUS can damage the kidneys and cause long term complications such as blindness, paralysis, and kidney failure.

You should not work if you are sick with STEC. This is especially important if you are a food handler, child care worker, or healthcare worker.

Talk to your doctor if you think you have STEC. Your doctor may ask for a stool sample to send to a laboratory. Most people do not need treatment. Do not take antibiotics or antidiarrheal medications, since these can make the illness worse. People with HUS may need treatment in a hospital.
Spread of Shiga Toxin Producing E. coli
People can get sick with STEC through:

- Eating Contaminated Food
- Drinking Contaminated Water or Raw Milk
- Contact with Stool of Infected Animals
- Swallowing Contaminated Recreational Water

STEC can also spread through touching the environment in petting zoos and other animal exhibits. It can also spread by eating food prepared by sick people who did not wash their hands well after using the toilet.

Prevent Shiga Toxin Producing E. coli

- Cook All Food Products Thoroughly
- Do Not Drink Raw Milk or Unpasteurized Dairy Products and Juices
- Use Separate Cutting Boards for Raw and Cooked Meat and Vegetables, Fruit, or Cheese
- Wash All Fruits and Vegetables Before Eating
- Always Wash Your Hands With Soap And Water:
  - Before eating and before and after preparing food
  - After using the toilet or changing diapers
  - After touching animals

STEC can also be prevented by not swallowing water when swimming or playing in recreational water. People with diarrhea should not share baths with others, prepare food for others, or swim until two weeks after diarrhea ends.

For More Information, Visit:
1. www.mainegov/dhhs/stec
2. www.cdc.gov/ecoli

You can also call Maine CDC at 1-800-821-5821.