

# Safe Food for Tennessee

Wit, Wisdom and Practical Advice  
on Food Safety



## OCTOBER

### Cook it Safely It's a Matter of Degrees

**Did you know...**

- ⇒ You can become seriously ill from food contaminated with bacteria or viruses?
- ⇒ Foodborne illness is more than a stomach ache and a little diarrhea?
- ⇒ Foodborne illness can kill or cause long-term problems such as kidney disease and arthritis?

## *E. coli* 101

**T**he recent outbreak of *E. coli* 0157:H7 from raw spinach has prompted many people to ask, "What is *E. coli* and how can I keep from getting sick?"

There are an estimated 73,000 infections and 61 deaths caused by *E. coli* 0157:H7 each year in the United States. This particular type of *E. coli* produces large quantities of one or more potent toxins causing severe damage to the lining of the intestine.

**Anyone can become sick from *E. coli* 0157:H7.** Common symptoms include cramping and diarrhea, which can start as watery and become bloody. Very young and elderly victims of *E. coli* 0157:H7 can develop hemolytic uremic syndrome (HUS) and hemolytic anemia (the destruction of red blood cells). HUS is the most common cause of kidney failure in infants and young children. *(continued on next page)*

## DO YOU TAKE UNNECESSARY RISKS?

Some kinds of behaviors place you at greater risk of *E. coli* 0157:H7 infection. If you answer yes to any of the following questions, you are taking unnecessary risks.

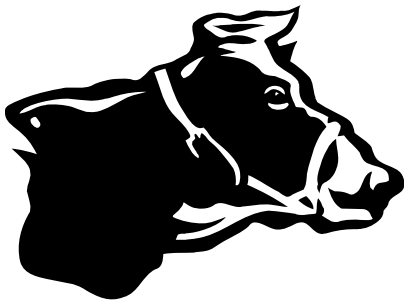
- |  |                              |                             |
|--|------------------------------|-----------------------------|
| 1. When eating a hamburger at a restaurant, do you eat it anyway when it looks pink in the middle? | <input type="checkbox"/> Yes | <input type="checkbox"/> No |
| 2. Do you guess when meat is done instead of using a thermometer?                                  | <input type="checkbox"/> Yes | <input type="checkbox"/> No |
| 3. Do you use the same plate to put cooked hamburgers you used for the raw hamburgers?             | <input type="checkbox"/> Yes | <input type="checkbox"/> No |
| 4. Do you wipe your hands on a kitchen towel after handling raw ground beef instead of washing?    | <input type="checkbox"/> Yes | <input type="checkbox"/> No |

### Recalls, Market Withdrawals and Safety Alerts

If you are looking for information on products that have been recalled, visit FDA Recalls, Market Withdrawals and Safety Alerts at <http://www.fda.gov/opacom/7alerts.html> on the Internet.

## *E. coli* 101 (cont'd)

How do *E. coli* bacteria get into food? They are present throughout the environment, but the source of much of the contamination of food is the digestive tracts of healthy animals. Bacteria from feces of animals can get on food when it is processed and can contaminate water used to wash foods such as produce.



People also can contaminate food when they do not wash their hands adequately after using the bathroom or handling raw meat. Or, they allow contaminated meat or its juices to come in contact with foods that are not cooked.

Consumers can prevent *E. coli* O157:H7 infection by:

- ☞ thoroughly cooking ground beef (until a thermometer reads 160° F),
- ☞ avoiding unpasteurized milk, and
- ☞ washing hands carefully before preparing or eating food.

Fruits and vegetables should be washed well, but washing may not remove all contamination. Public service announcements on television, radio, or in the newspapers will advise you which foods to avoid in the event of an outbreak.

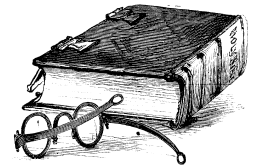
Why are we hearing some much about these bacteria in recent years? *E. coli* O157:H7 is a fairly new pathogen (a pathogen is an organism that causes illness). An outbreak in Washington state in 1993 at a fast food hamburger establishment was the first time many people had heard of these bacteria. Unfortunately, bacteria change the way they grow and survive so that new types emerge over time.

Determining where contamination occurs can be a long and difficult process. It can happen anywhere in the food chain, from “farm to fork.” It can come from any part of the country, or the world. By the time the contaminated product is removed from the food supply, people may have already become ill. That is why prevention is the best way to stop foodborne illness. This requires work on the part of the farmer, producer,

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grocer,  
restaurant  
and  
consumer.

### PRACTICAL



It shouldn't  
take an  
outbreak  
of *E. coli*

### PRIMER

that makes at least 199 people sick, and three people die, to remind everyone to take foodborne illness seriously. It can be more than a stomach ache from something you have eaten, it can be life-threatening and far more serious than people think.

To learn more about *E. coli* O157:H7, go to FDA's *Bad Bug Book* at <http://www.cfsan.fda.gov/~mow/chap15.html>.



**Cook ground beef to 160° F.**



**Safe Food for Tennessee** is a program brought to you by University of Tennessee Extension, Family and Consumer Sciences. For more information on food safety, contact your local Extension office. State Contact: Janie Burney, PhD, RD, [jburney@utk.edu](mailto:jburney@utk.edu).

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