

# Know the FACTS

## E. coli: What You Need to Know

E. coli are bacteria commonly found in the environment, food, water and the digestive system of people and animals. While most types are harmless and support digestion, vitamin production and immune defense, some can cause illnesses like diarrhea, urinary tract infections and more.

### Can E. coli harm your health?

Most E. coli are harmless and support healthy digestion, but some strains can cause serious illness. Harmful strains produce a toxin that can lead to diarrhea and, in rare cases, severe complications like kidney failure.



### Where is E. coli found?

E. coli can be found in many everyday places. You might come into contact with it when swimming in pools, lakes, or rivers, boating, eating undercooked meat, drinking unpasteurized milk or juice, or touching unsanitized surfaces. It can also be present in untreated water used for drinking, cooking, or brushing teeth while camping, hiking, or traveling.

### What are the symptoms?

Symptoms may include diarrhea (sometimes bloody), stomach cramps, and vomiting. Most people recover within a few days, but dehydration and serious complications can occur, particularly in young children, older adults, and those with weakened immune systems.

### How can you prevent infection?

- Drink only pasteurized milk, juice and other beverages.
- Use treated or purified water when camping, hiking, or traveling.
- Avoid swallowing water while swimming or boating, and stay out of pools or lakes if you are sick with diarrhea.
- Cook all meat thoroughly.
- Keep raw and cooked foods separate to avoid cross-contamination.
- Thoroughly wash all produce, kitchen surfaces and utensils.
- Wash your hands often, especially after using the bathroom or handling raw food.

### Additional resources

**Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC):** [cdc.gov/ecoli](https://cdc.gov/ecoli)

**Ohio Department of Health (ODH):** [odh.ohio.gov](https://odh.ohio.gov)



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