

# Hamburger Disease (*E. coli* O157:H7)



Public Health Division  
Environmental Public Health Services

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**Capital Health**  
**EDMONTON AREA**

## WHAT IS HAMBURGER DISEASE?

Hamburger Disease is the name of an illness caused by eating food such as hamburgers and other ground meats contaminated with the bacterium *Escherichia coli* (*E. coli* O157:H7). Each year, *E. coli* O157:H7 infects 40 to 50 residents in Capital Health and can be fatal.



## HOW IS THE DISEASE PREVENTED?

When preparing ground meat of any kind (beef, pork, turkey, etc.):

- ◆ Always wash your hands **BEFORE** handling food and **AFTER** handling raw meat.
- ◆ **BEFORE** and **AFTER** preparing ground meat, wash the work surface and every utensil or equipment used in preparing the meat.



- ◆ Never prepare any food on the same surface that was used to prepare raw meat unless the surface has been thoroughly cleaned with hot soapy water, washed in the dishwasher or sanitized with bleach. *E. coli* can transfer to other foods prepared later on the same site if the surface is not cleaned properly.
- ◆ **KEEP COLD FOODS COLD** (less than 4°C /40°F) and **HOT FOODS HOT** (above 60°C/140°F)



- ◆ Thaw all meat in the refrigerator.
- ◆ Most importantly, **cook all ground meat thoroughly**, because cooking kills the bacteria. Make sure the meat is brown, not red or pink, and the juices run clear.
- ◆ For an extra measure of safety, use a thermometer to ensure that the meat has reached a high enough internal temperature ( i.e. 71°C/160°F ).

## WHAT ARE THE SYMPTOMS?

Symptoms of *E. coli* infection appear two to eight days after eating the contaminated food.

Symptoms of the infection often include:

- ◆ Severe stomach cramps and diarrhea (which may be bloody).
- ◆ Dehydration, due to the loss of fluid.
- ◆ Low grade fever.

The illness usually lasts 7 to 10 days. Most people recover without drugs or treatment. However, the very young or elderly are more likely to have serious problems (such as kidney failure) which could result in death. For this reason, anyone with bloody diarrhea should see their doctor immediately.

