- Store cooked meats in the fridge separately, on a shelf higher than raw meat.
- Avoid drinking unpasteurised milk and never drink from streams or rivers.

Owners of private water supplies should ensure they are properly maintained. Advice can be obtained from your local Environmental Health Officer.

If you or a member of your family have E.coli 0157/ VTEC infection, make sure the toilet and bathroom fittings (e.g. door handles) are cleaned and disinfected thoroughly.

If you have more than one toilet in your household, advise the infected person to only use one and the rest of the household to use the other. Any infected person with diarrhoea should remain off work or school until they have had no symptoms for 48 hours.

There are certain groups of people (e.g. food handlers, healthcare workers, young children) who may have to remain off work or school until stool samples have been tested to show that they no longer carry E.coli 0157/VTEC. Stool sample results should be available within 2-3 working days.

How should hands be washed?

- Always use warm, running water and a mild, preferably liquid, soap. (It is not essential to use soaps labeled as antiseptic or antibacterial.)
- Wet hands and apply a small amount of soap.
- Rub hands together vigorously for 20 seconds. Pay special attention to areas between fingers, finger tips and palms.
- Rinse hands under warm running water and dry thoroughly on a clean dry towel.

Useful Information

Food Standards Scotland www.foodstandards.gov.scot

NHS 24 Freephone 111
www.nhs24.scot

Further information and help

For further information please contact your GP.

We are listening - how did we do?

We welcome your feedback, as it helps us evaluate the services we provide. If you would like to tell us about your experience:

- speak to a member of staff
- visit our website feedback section at: www.wihb.scot.nhs.uk or share your story at: www.care-opinion.org.uk or 0800 122 31 35
- tel. 01851 481814 and leave a message, or email wi.feedback@nhs.scot

Version: 6 Review Date: November 2028
Produced by: Health Protection Team, NHS Western Isles.

Disclaimer
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NHS Eileanan Siar Western Isles

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NHS Western Isles

Health Protection Team

Verotoxin-producing E. coli and E. coli O157



Patient Information Leaflet

What is E.coli 0157 /VTEC?

Escherichia coli (E. coli) refers to germs (bacteria) found in the human intestine. Most are harmless but Verotoxigenic E. coli (VTEC) produces toxins that can cause severe disease in people.

E. coli O157 is the most commonly detected VTEC in humans in Scotland. The information in this leaflet applies to both E.coli 0157 and VTEC.

What are the symptoms?

People who have a VTEC infection may initially feel unwell with stomach cramps, fever and diarrhoea. Occasionally the diarrhoea becomes bloody. Rarely, there can be complications such as kidney damage, and problems with blood clotting, both of which require urgent hospital treatment.

Should I see my GP?

You should consult your GP if one or more of the following applies to you:

- there is blood in your diarrhoea
- you have severe abdominal pain
- the diarrhoea has lasted for 48 hours.
- nausea/vomiting.

Some people show few or no symptoms. If you suspect you have contracted E-coli you will need to provide a stool specimen to confirm this, in which case you should contact your General Practitioner (GP).

Where does E.coli 0157/ VTEC come from?

The main source of infection is the intestine of healthy cattle, but it has also been found in the intestines of sheep, horses, farmed deer, goats, dogs and wild birds.

Unpasteurised milk, contaminated raw vegetables and contaminated water are also potential sources of infection.

How does it spread?

- Direct contact with infected animals, or their faeces, eating undercooked meat, or drinking unpasteurised dairy products.
- Indirect contact with infected animals e.g. objects (clothing) contaminated with animal manure.
- Drinking water that is contaminated with animal faeces – this is more likely to occur with private supplies, or stream water as public water supplies normally go through a rigorous treatment process.
- Eating unwashed/unpeeled fruit or vegetables that are contaminated with infected manure.
- Contact with the faeces of an infected person.
- Only very small numbers of the bacteria are needed to cause illness.
- Person-to-person spread

What is the incubation period?

The incubation period, which is the time from first swallowing the bacteria to becoming ill, ranges from 6 hours to 10 days though 2 to 4 days is most common.

How are infections treated?

There is no specific treatment, and antibiotics are not useful. It is important to drink plenty of fluids to make sure that you don't become dehydrated. Clear fluids like water and diluted fruit juice are recommended.

Your GP may wish to do some blood tests to make sure no complications are developing. You will be contacted by the NHS Western Isles Health Protection team, who will assess possible sources of the infection and whether there is still a risk to anyone else being exposed.

For the majority of people, the illness resolves in 5-10 days. The infectious period is defined as being from the onset of gastrointestinal symptoms until 48 hours symptom free.

How can infection be prevented?

- Wash hands thoroughly after contact with all animals and their faeces.
- If you work with animals, launder your overalls separately, and remove your footwear before going into the house.
- Wash hands after using the toilet or changing nappies.
- Make sure meat is always thoroughly