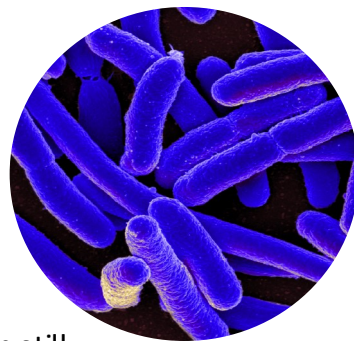


# SHIGA TOXIN-PRODUCING *E. COLI* (STEC)



## What is STEC and what are the symptoms?

*Escherichia coli* (*E. coli*) are a group of bacteria. Most *E. coli* are harmless, but some, like Shiga toxin-producing *E. coli* (STEC), cause illness. Most people infected with STEC develop **diarrhea** (often bloody), **stomach cramps**, and **vomiting**. Symptoms typically start within **3 to 4 days** after being exposed, but it can take longer. Sometimes people infected with STEC have no symptoms at all, but they can still pass the bacteria to others.

## How long does it last?

Most people infected with STEC typically feel better in **5 to 10 days** and usually recover with fluids and rest. It is recommended to avoid antibiotics and antidiarrheal medicines, such as Imodium®, because they can prolong or worsen symptoms. Some people with severe symptoms may need to be hospitalized and others may develop a severe complication called hemolytic uremic syndrome (HUS).

## How does it spread?

STEC bacteria live in the intestines of people and animals. Transmission occurs in the following ways:

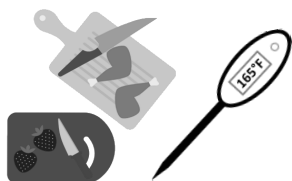
- **Food:** Eating foods that are contaminated with feces from an infected animal, from environmental contamination, from cross-contamination in a kitchen, or eating foods that were prepared by someone who is sick with STEC.
- **Water:** Swallowing water while swimming or drinking water contaminated with STEC bacteria.
- **Person-to-Person Contact:** Some infections occur when the bacteria passes from the stool or soiled fingers of one person to the mouth of another person either through food handling or direct contact.
- **Animal Contact:** Touching or handling animals or their environments.

## How can I prevent STEC infections?

**Wash your hands** with soap and water before preparing or eating foods, having contact with animals or their environment, and after using the bathroom or changing a diaper.



**Practice food safety:** Avoid cross-contamination in the kitchen, wash and cook foods thoroughly, store foods properly, and avoid unpasteurized (raw) dairy products and juices.



If you have diarrhea, **do not handle, prepare, or cook foods** for others at home or at your job\* until your symptoms have resolved.



**Avoid swallowing water** from ponds, lakes, and untreated swimming pools, and, if you have diarrhea, avoid swimming until your symptoms have resolved.



If you think you might have Shiga toxin-producing *E. coli*, contact your health care provider. Visit [www.dph.illinois.gov](http://www.dph.illinois.gov) or contact your [local health department](#) for more information.

\*Cases shall not work as food handlers or in sensitive occupations until diarrhea has ceased for at least 24 hours and two consecutive negative stool specimens are obtained.