Shiga-Toxin E. Coli (STEC)

What is Shiga-toxin producing E. coli (STEC)?
E. coli are bacteria that normally live in intestines of humans and animals. There are many strains of E. coli bacteria; most of them are harmless. However, some kinds of E. coli cause illness by making a toxin. STEC is a highly infectious form that produces a toxin called Shiga. These infections may be associated with other severe problems.

How is it spread?
STEC can be spread through eating raw or undercooked beef, by consuming contaminated water or food (lettuce, spinach, melons, alfalfa sprouts, unpasteurized apple cider, unpasteurized milk, or soft cheeses made from unpasteurized milk). A person can become infected by swallowing contaminated lake water, or by touching contaminated surface in petting zoos or other animal exhibits. Infected individuals may spread the illness to others if they do not wash their hands properly. An infected person is contagious for a week, children up to 3 weeks.

What are the symptoms?
Symptoms appear 2-10 days after exposure with an average of 3-4 days. Symptoms of STEC include: diarrhea (which often becomes bloody), stomach cramps, vomiting, and a mild fever, in some cases.

How is STEC treated?
Antibiotics normally are not required. If you have diarrhea, drink plenty of fluids to prevent dehydration. Hospitalization may be required on rare occasions. Food service workers, healthcare workers, or childcare workers must report their sickness to their supervisor and not work until the illness is over. Do not return to work until you are cleared by a health care provider.

Other Important Information/Prevention Information
Wash your hands thoroughly after using the bathroom or changing diapers and before preparing or eating food. Wash your hands after contact with animals or their environments (at farms, petting zoos, fairs, even your own backyard).

Cook meats thoroughly. Ground beef and meat that has been needle-tenderized should be cooked to a temperature of at least 160°F/70°C. It’s best to use a thermometer, as color is not a very reliable indicator of “doneness.”

Avoid raw milk, unpasteurized dairy products, and unpasteurized juices (like fresh apple cider).

Avoid swallowing water when swimming or playing in lakes, ponds, streams, swimming pools, and backyard “kiddie” pools.

Prevent cross contamination in food preparation areas by thoroughly washing hands, counters, cutting boards, and utensils after they touch raw meat.

More information can be found at [www.cdc.gov/ecoli](http://www.cdc.gov/ecoli)