E coli 0157 infection

Information for patients

This leaflet can be made available in other formats including large print, CD and Braille and in languages other than English, upon request.

This leaflet tells you about E coli 0157, the germ which is causing you to have diarrhoea.

What is E coli 0157?

E coli is a bacterium (germ) that can cause infection, it is sometimes called verocytotoxin producing E coli (VTEC).

What are the symptoms?

Symptoms include:
• diarrhoea, which can sometimes contain blood
• stomach cramps
• fever (high temperature).

A small number of people with E coli 0157 infection go on to develop a serious condition called haemolytic uraemic syndrome (HUS). This can lead to kidney failure and death although this is rare. The risk of HUS is highest in children under 5.

How did I get E coli 0157?

E coli 0157 is found in the gut and faeces (poo) of many animals including cattle and can be caught in different ways, for example:
• eating contaminated food such as raw leafy vegetables or undercooked meat.
• touching infected animals or their faeces.
• contact with people who have the illness especially if they do not wash their hands properly after using the toilet.
• swimming in or drinking contaminated water such as ponds or streams.

Is there any treatment?

There is no special treatment and most people can be cared for at home.

You should drink plenty of fluids (not alcohol) so you do not become dehydrated (lack of fluid in your body).

Antibiotics and anti-diarrhoea drugs are not usually recommended and may increase the risk of complications. If you or your child have blood in your diarrhoea you should ask your GP for advice.
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If you are in hospital you will usually be cared for in a single room and staff looking after you will wear aprons and gloves. If you are taking the contraceptive pill and you have severe vomiting or diarrhoea you will need to take extra precautions. Ask your doctor if you need any advice.

If you have E coli 0157 your doctor will have to notify the Environmental Health Officer and Public Health England.

How can E coli 0157 be prevented?

You can reduce the chance of catching or spreading E coli 0157 by:

- washing your hands well and often, especially after going to the toilet or changing nappies.
- washing your hands before and after preparing food.
- washing your hands after handling clothes or bedding belonging to someone with the infection.
- washing soiled clothes and bedding separately from other items at the highest possible temperature.
- cleaning toilets and wash basins with hot water and disinfectant using disposable cloths.

If you have E coli 0157 you must stay off work or school until you have had no diarrhoea for 2 days. Some people, especially children, may carry E coli 0157 for several months after they have recovered.

You may need to take special care before returning to work or school.

If you work in health or social care or your work involves handling food you need to ask your local environmental health officer about when it is safe to return to work.

This applies to those people who have been infected and their household contacts.

If a child under 5 has been infected, or lives with someone who has, you need to talk to your GP about when it is safe to return to school or nursery.

Children under 5 must not swim or paddle in public pools until they have been tested to see if they are clear of the infection.
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Contact numbers

If you have any questions or worries please talk to your GP or nurse or you can contact a member of the hospital Infection Prevention and Control Team.

North Tees and Hartlepool NHS Foundation Trust

Infection Prevention Control Team
telephone: 01642 383280
Monday - Friday, 9.00am - 5.00pm

Further information is available from:

NHS Choices
telephone: 111 (when it is less urgent than 999)
Calls to this number are free from landlines and mobile phones
or via the website at www.nhs.uk

Environmental Health Departments

Stockton Borough Council
telephone: 01642 526575 / 526576

Hartlepool Borough Council
telephone: 01429 266522

Durham City Council
telephone: 0191 3018470

Information used in the development of this leaflet:

This leaflet has been produced in partnership with patients and carers. All patient leaflets are regularly reviewed, and any suggestions you have as to how it may be improved are extremely valuable. Please write to the Quality Assurance Team, University Hospital of North Tees or email: patientinformation@nth.nhs.uk

Comments, Concerns, Compliments or Complaints

We are continually trying to improve the services we provide.

We want to know what we’re doing well or if there’s anything which we can improve, that’s why the Patient Experience Team is here to help.

Our Patient Experience Team is here to try to resolve your concerns as quickly as possible. If you would like to contact or request a copy of our PET leaflet, please contact:

   telephone: 01642 624719
   Monday – Friday, 9.00 am – 4.00 pm
   Messages can be left on the answering machine and will be picked up throughout the day.

   freephone: 0800 092 0084
   Mobile: (can use text): 0779 506 1883
   Email: patientexperience@nth.nhs.uk

Out of hours if you wish to speak to a senior member of Trust staff, please contact the hospital switchboard who will bleep the appropriate person.

   telephone: 01642 617617
   24 hours a day, 7 days a week

The Patient Experience Team is available to discuss your concerns in person Monday – Friday, 1.30 pm – 4.30 pm. The office is based at the University Hospital of North Tees. It is near the lifts in the main tower block.

Data Protection and use of patient information

The Trust has developed a Data Protection Policy in accordance with the Data Protection Act 1988 and the Freedom of Information Act 2000. All of our staff respect this policy and confidentiality is adhered to at all times. If you require further information please contact the Information Governance Team.

   telephone: 01642 833551 or email: information.governance@nth.nhs.uk

University Hospital of North Tees, Hardwick, Stockton-on-Tees. TS19 8PE
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