

August 1, 2014

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Increase in E. coli illness in AHS Edmonton Zone

EDMONTON – Following a recent cluster of E. coli O157:H7 illness in the Edmonton Zone, Alberta Health Services (AHS) is advising people to take the following precautions to prevent the spread of illness, particularly during the upcoming holiday weekend:

- Cook beef to at least 71 °C (160 °F).
- Thoroughly wash vegetables and fruits before eating.
- In the kitchen, wash your hands with hot, soapy water often, especially after you touch raw meat.
- Wash any tools or kitchen surfaces that have touched raw meat.
- Use only pasteurized milk, dairy, and juice products.
- Use only treated, or chlorinated, drinking water.
- When you travel to countries that may have unsafe drinking water, don't use ice or drink tap water. Avoid raw fruits and vegetables, except those with skin that you peel yourself.
- Wash your hands often, and always wash them after you use the bathroom or change diapers.

E. coli (*Escherichia coli*) is the name of a germ, or bacterium, that lives in the digestive tracts of humans and animals. There are many types of E. coli, and most of them are harmless. Some strains of E. coli can cause illness, predominantly abdominal cramping and diarrhea that may be bloody. However, some strains of E. coli bacteria (such as a strain called O157:H7) can cause more severe illness, including severe anemia or kidney failure, which can lead to death.

E. coli infections happen when someone comes into contact with the feces, or stool, of humans or animals. This can happen when you drink water or eat food that has been contaminated by feces.

Individuals with diarrheal illness, especially bloody diarrhea, should consider seeking medical attention. For 24/7 health advice call Health Link Alberta toll-free at 1-866-408-5465 (LINK).

Alberta Health Services is the provincial health authority responsible for planning and delivering health supports and services for more than four million adults and children living in Alberta. Its mission is to provide a patient-focused, quality health system that is accessible and sustainable for all Albertans.

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