

ENTEROTOXIGENIC *E. COLI*

(ETEC)



Escherichia coli (*E. coli*) are bacteria that are found in the environment, food, and the intestines of animals and people. Most types of *E. coli* are harmless and are an important part of the digestive tract, but some can make you sick. Enterotoxigenic *E. coli* (ETEC) is a type of *E. coli* bacteria that can cause diarrhea. Anyone can become infected with ETEC. It is a common cause of diarrhea in developing countries especially among children and travelers to those countries. However, even people who do not leave the United States can get sick with ETEC infection.

What causes it?



ETEC is spread in food or water that is contaminated with feces (poop). If people do not wash their hands when preparing food or beverages, or if crops are watered using contaminated water, food can become contaminated with feces.

What are the signs and symptoms?



Symptoms can be seen as soon as 10 hours after being infected with ETEC, or may take up to 72 hours to appear. Symptoms usually last less than five days, but may last longer. Sometimes people can have ETEC and not have any symptoms. ETEC is not easy to test for in feces.

- ▶ Watery diarrhea (without blood or mucus)
- ▶ Stomach cramps
- ▶ Vomiting
- ▶ Dehydration
- ▶ Weakness
- ▶ Fever (may or may not be present)

What are the treatment options?



- ▶ People who are sick with ETEC may need to be given fluids so they do not become dehydrated. Most people recover with supportive care alone and do not need other treatment.
- ▶ If an antibiotic is needed, testing should be done to see what kind of antibiotic will work against the particular strain of ETEC.

How can it be prevented?



- ▶ Travelers to developing countries should be careful with what they eat and drink, and remember to “Boil it, Cook it, Peel it, or Forget it.” Some high-risk foods are raw fruits and vegetables, raw seafood, undercooked meat or poultry, unpasteurized dairy products, food from street vendors, and untreated water (including ice) in areas where there is not enough chlorination.
- ▶ Wash your hands with soap and water after going to the bathroom and before making food to prevent contaminating foods or beverages.
- ▶ People with an ETEC infection who work in food handling, provide patient care or child care, or who attend a child care facility should stay home while they have symptoms and until they have been free from diarrhea for 24 hours. Food workers will need to be cleared by their local health department before returning to work.

