

E. coli – how
to protect
the children
in your care



E. coli – how to protect the children in your care

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Food Safety Authority of Ireland

Abbey Court

Lower Abbey Street

Dublin 1

Telephone: +353 1 817 1300

Facsimile: +353 1 817 1301

Email: info@fsai.ie

Website: www.fsai.ie

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E. coli – how to protect the children in your care

E. coli bacteria live in our guts. Most types are harmless but others can cause serious illness.

Babies and young children are at very high risk because their immune systems are still developing. In Ireland, there have been *E. coli* outbreaks among children in childcare settings. To prevent the spread of harmful *E. coli* to children in your care:

- Wash **hands** properly – and often
- Use a safe **water** supply
- Prepare **food** hygienically and store it properly
- Wash hands after contact with **animals**



How do you get infected?

You can catch *E. coli* from:

- Another person
- Touching animals, or their surroundings
- Drinking contaminated water
- Eating contaminated food

E. coli bacteria live in the guts of people and animals, so the infection is spread through faeces.

Symptoms of *E. coli* infection

These include:

- Tummy cramps
- Diarrhoea, which can be bloody
- Kidney failure, especially in young children

Some people who have harmful *E. coli* in their gut do not become ill (they are asymptomatic). They can still pass it on to other people.



Stop the spread!

E. coli (and other types of stomach bug) can be spread by diarrhoea or vomit.



Childcare providers must take action

Childcare providers must take steps to prevent the spread of infection under the Childcare (Pre-School Services) (No. 2) Regulations, 2006. If a child in your care has *E. coli* infection you must contact your local Department of Public Health for advice and support to prevent more cases.

Keep away from the childcare facility

Staff or children who have diarrhoea or vomiting should keep away from the childcare facility for 48 hours after their last bout of diarrhoea or vomiting. Managers should include this instruction in their illness policy.



Childminders who have diarrhoea or vomiting should not mind children

Childminders who have diarrhoea or vomiting should not mind children for 48 hours after their last bout of diarrhoea or vomiting – parents should make alternative childcare arrangements.

What should I do if a child has diarrhoea or vomits in the childcare facility?

- Contact their parents to take them home as soon as possible
- Let the child rest somewhere away from the other children until they can be collected
- Keep other children away from the soiled area until it has been cleaned and disinfected
- Contact your local Department of Public Health if you notice that two or more children have vomiting or diarrhoea – they will give advice and support to prevent more cases

How should I clean up diarrhoea or vomit?

1. Put on a disposable plastic apron and gloves
2. Remove soiled clothes and wash the child's hands and face
3. Use paper towels to remove any soiling from surfaces
4. Clean the area using a general purpose detergent
5. Disinfect the area using a chlorine-based disinfectant; then dry using paper towels
6. Dispose of used paper towels, aprons and gloves hygienically
7. Wash your hands afterwards

Remember

- Detergents clean dirt
- Disinfectants kill germs



How should I clean soiled laundry?

1. Put on disposable plastic apron and gloves
2. Flush any solids down the toilet – don't rinse soiled laundry in the sink as this can spread *E. coli*
3. Put the laundry directly into the washing machine and wash at the highest temperature the fabric allows
4. Wash your hands afterwards

If you can't wash soiled clothes in the childcare facility, flush solids down the toilet and place the clothes in a sealed, waterproof bag for washing at home. Explain to parents the best way to handle the soiled clothes to reduce the risk of spreading infection.



Tip

It's useful to have a 'clean-up kit' ready for use!

How can I avoid *E. coli*?

Handwashing

Washing hands is the single most important way you can stop the spread of *E. coli*.

Always wash your hands:

- After using the toilet
- After changing nappies
- Before eating or preparing food



Help children wash and dry their hands as they can find it difficult to do this properly. Babies need to have their hands washed as often as older children .



Don't use a shared hand-washing bowl

Washing hands in the same bowl of water will spread germs between children.



*This poster is available to download at:
www.safefood.eu*

When washing hands use:

- Liquid soap
- Warm water (not too hot); and
- Paper towels

The best technique is to:

1. Wet hands
2. Soap them
3. Rub them well
4. Rinse them; and
5. Then dry



Gel alone is not enough

Cleaning hands with wipes or hand gels alone is not enough! Wash hands properly using soap and water.

Safe water supply

Use a safe water supply because harmful *E. coli* can be found in water that hasn't been treated properly.

Group water scheme

If you use a group water scheme – make sure the water complies with European drinking water standards. Contact the water supply's operator for more information.

Private water supply

If you use a private water supply, have the water tested for bacteria. Contact your local council or environmental health office for advice.



Boil water when necessary

If there is a problem with bacteria in the water, make sure to boil it before using it for drinking or preparing food.

Prepare food hygienically and store it properly

- Wash your hands before preparing food and after handling raw meat
- Cook meat so that it is no longer pink and the juices run clear. Use a meat thermometer to check that the centre of the meat is 75°C or hotter
- Cook stews and pies until piping hot all the way through – check the temperature of the largest piece of meat
- Bacteria that cause food poisoning grow well between 5°C and 63°C, so keep hot food hot, and cold food cold
- Check your fridge is cooler than 5°C
- Prevent cross-contamination. Never let raw meat, or its juices, come into contact with cooked meat, or food that won't be cooked before eating
- Wash fruit and vegetables before eating
- Only use pasteurised milk and dairy products
- Only use pasteurised juices (unless you prepare them just before drinking)
- Don't serve foods that contain raw meat, such as some salamis

Food prepared on your premises

If you prepare food on your premises, you must contact your local environmental health office. They will advise you about requirements you need under food law, such as food safety training and having a food safety management system based on HACCP (Hazard Analysis and Critical Control Point) in place.

We have produced a 'Safe Catering Pack' which helps you to set up your HACCP system. The pack costs €60 (plus €10 for delivery). To buy a copy:

- Contact our Advice Line on 1890 33 66 77
- Email info@fsai.ie or
- Buy online at www.fsai.ie



***E. coli* and animals**

You can catch *E. coli* from animals or their surroundings. There have been *E. coli* outbreaks among children who have visited open farms, so if you bring children on a farm visit:

- Wash hands after being near to or touching animals
- Wash hands before eating or drinking
- Only eat in areas set aside for eating
- Tell children not to put their hands near their mouths
- Remove dirty boots and dirty clothes before returning to the childcare facility – and wash hands afterwards





Pets or animals can be a source of infection

Pets or animals brought into childcare facilities for a visit can be a source of infection. Reptiles – such as lizards, snakes, terrapins and turtles – should not be allowed in childcare facilities as they carry *Salmonella* and can easily pass it on to children.



Where can I get more information on stopping the spread of infection?

You should read the following documents, available on the Health Protection Surveillance Centre's website: www.hpsc.ie

- Management of Infectious Disease in Childcare Facilities and Other Childcare Settings
- Preventing Foodborne Disease: A Focus on the Infected Food Handler
- Recommendations to Prevent VTEC on Open/Pet Farms



Useful websites

www.environ.ie

List of local council offices

www.fsai.ie

Food Safety Authority of Ireland

www.hpsc.ie

Health Protection Surveillance Centre

www.hse.ie

For a copy of the Childcare Regulations and for a list of local Department of Public Health offices and local environmental health offices

www.safefood.eu

For pre-school handwashing poster

Top tips for preventing the spread of *E. coli*

1. Wash hands properly – and often
2. Use a safe water supply
3. Prepare food hygienically, and store it properly
4. Wash hands after contact with animals
5. Stay away for 48 hours if you have had diarrhoea or vomiting
6. Contact your Department of Public Health for advice and support to prevent more cases



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