



Information about

Verotoxigenic *Escherichia coli* (VTEC) Infection

Why Have You Been Given This Leaflet?

Your local council has a responsibility to investigate food poisoning and certain incidents of infectious disease. An officer from your local council's Environmental Health Department is contacting you to try and find out where your infection may have come from and to give advice on preventing further spread to others.

NHS Tayside Health Protection Team has notified your local Environmental Health Department that you or one of your household is suffering from a VTEC infection. They are often the first to tell you what type of infection you have rather than your General Practitioner (GP).

The aim of this leaflet is to give you information and to answer some of the most frequently asked questions about Verotoxigenic *Escherichia coli* (VTEC) infection. **Please take time to read this leaflet.**

What is VTEC infection?

It is an infection caused by a particular strain of the family of bacteria (germs) called *Escherichia coli* (*E. coli*). Some strains of *E. coli* are harmless; however some types produce toxins and can cause severe illness in people, even when small amounts are swallowed.

Where does it come from?

VTEC bacteria are commonly found in the bowels of cattle and other farm animals. Their faeces can lead to the contamination of soil, food and untreated water.

How can you get VTEC infection?

You can become infected by

- Eating contaminated food, mainly meat, unpasteurised milk and cheese
- Contact with infected animals, such as at farms or zoos
- Contact with other people who have the illness, **through inadequate hand washing** after using the toilet, and/or before food handling, particularly in households, nurseries and infant schools
- Eating unwashed raw vegetables (including salad), which may have been contaminated by manure
- Drinking or swimming in untreated water e.g. rivers, wells, springs or burns

What are the usual symptoms?

The main symptoms are

- Severe stomach cramps
- Diarrhoea which might be bloody
- Fever.

Some infected people may have mild diarrhoea or no symptoms at all. A very small number of people may develop associated kidney failure and/or blood problems. This is more likely for children and the elderly, who can become seriously ill.

When do the symptoms start?

It usually takes 3 to 4 days for symptoms to develop after swallowing the bacteria but sometimes can take as long as 2 weeks.

How long do the symptoms last?

Symptoms can last up to 2 weeks, or even longer in some cases. Most people get rid of the bacteria after about 1 week although children may continue to carry it for longer periods.

How do you treat a VTEC infection?

The infection will usually settle without any treatment. However, for those aged under 16 years, over 60 years or those who have severe abdominal pain with bloody diarrhoea, the risk of more serious illness is greater therefore it is important to consult your GP or NHS 24 immediately.

It is important to drink fluids to replace the water lost through having diarrhoea and vomiting. This applies particularly for babies, children and the elderly.

If your symptoms get worse consult your GP or seek medical advice from NHS 24 immediately.

Do I need to stay off nursery, school, work, or other activities?

Yes, it is important to stay at home until your symptoms have been stopped for 2 days and you are fully recovered.

If you are an adult you should stay away from work and avoid visiting others. If you are a child it is important to stay away from school, nursery, playgroup or mother and toddler group and avoid visiting others.

You should tell your employer you have VTEC if you work with vulnerable groups such as the elderly, the young, those in poor health or if you work as a food handler.

If any of your household are young children, work as a food handler, or provide care for or work with vulnerable groups they should stay off school or work until NHS Tayside Health Protection Team are sure they have not acquired the infection.

NHS Tayside Health Protection Team will contact and advise those who may be required to stay off nursery, school, work or other activities.

What should I do if I have symptoms again?

If your symptoms return or become more severe (e.g. blood in diarrhoea) you should see a GP or seek medical advice from NHS 24 immediately.

What should I do if I know of others with similar symptoms?

If they are an adult with symptoms which last for more than 2 days they should consult their GP or seek medical advice from NHS 24.

If they are under 16 years, over 60 years or an adult with severe abdominal pain with bloody diarrhoea and the symptoms are worsening, they should consult their GP or seek medical advice from NHS 24 immediately.

They should, if possible, submit a stool sample via their GP.

You should tell the officer of the Environmental Health Department the details of the others you know to be ill. This information can help in identifying sources of infection.

How can you avoid getting or passing to others a VTEC infection?

Wash your hands thoroughly with soap and warm water

- Before preparing, handling or eating foods
- After handling raw food especially meat or poultry
- As soon as possible after working, feeding, grooming or playing with pets and other animals
- You should pay special attention to hygiene during farm visits, washing hands after any contact with animals, and eating only in designated areas
- After going to the toilet or changing a child's nappy
- By ensuring young children wash their hands.

Handle food and drink safely

- Thoroughly cook meat and poultry so that they are cooked all the way through, and no blood runs from them
- Thaw frozen food properly before cooking
- Always reheat food thoroughly
- Do not use the same knives, chopping boards and equipment for preparing raw foods and cooked or ready to eat foods
- Thoroughly clean knives, chopping boards and equipment used for preparing raw foods with hot water and detergent after each use
- Never put cooked food back on an unwashed plate previously used for uncooked meat
- Do not wash raw meat because this will splash germs around
- Store cooked or ready to eat food in the fridge separately from raw meats. Raw foods should not be stored above or beside cooked or ready to eat food.
- Store uncooked meat on the bottom of the fridge to avoid dripping raw meat juices onto other food
- Wash all fruit, salads and vegetables that are to be eaten raw
- Do not drink untreated water or unpasteurised milk
- Do not use ice or drinking water in countries where the water supply might be unsafe
- Do not buy ready to eat foods from shops where you believe food hygiene standards are poor. Report such places to your local Environmental Health Department.
- **Do not** prepare food for others until your diarrhoea and vomiting symptoms have been stopped for 48 hours.

Household Measures:

Whilst you have symptoms you need to be scrupulously clean around your home.

- Make sure all members of your household wash their hands thoroughly with soap and hot water after going to the toilet and after handling soiled clothing or bedding
- Make sure that everyone has their own towel and that they do not use anybody else's
- Wash all soiled clothes, bedding and towels in the washing machine on the hottest cycle that the manufacturer would recommend
- Clean toilet seats, toilet bowls, flush handles, taps and wash hand basins after use with detergent and hot water, followed by a household disinfectant.

Water Safety:

- Do not use swimming pools (including hot tubs and paddling pools, etc.) if you have diarrhoea. This is normally until you have had no symptoms for 2 days. However, preschool children and anyone who has difficulty with controlling their bodily functions and/or personal hygiene should avoid swimming until NHS Tayside Health Protection Team advises they are clear of the infection.
- Do not swim in water that may be contaminated
- Do not drink untreated water and avoid swallowing water when in lakes and swimming pools
- If your water supply is from a private water source please discuss this with the Environmental Health Department.

Where can you get further advice?

If you would like any further advice about VTEC infection or food hygiene, please contact your local Environmental Health Department. The local offices are listed below

Angus Council

Communities Department

Dewar House

12 Hill Terrace

Arbroath

DD11 1AH

Website: www.angus.gov.uk

Email: envhealth@angus.gov.uk



Tele: 01241 435600

Dundee City Council

Environmental Protection Division

Environment Department

3 City Square

Dundee

DD1 3BA

Website: www.dundee.gov.uk

Email: food.safety@dundee.gov.uk



Tele: 01382 433710

Perth & Kinross Council

Environmental and Consumer Services

Pullar House

35 Kinnoull Street

Perth

PH1 5GD

Website: www.pkc.gov.uk

Email: enquiries@pkc.gov.uk



Tele: 01738 476476

Other useful sources of information

The National Hand Washing Campaign

www.washyourhandsofthem.com

The Food Standards Agency

www.food.gov.uk

Travel and Immunisation Advice

www.fitfortravel.com

NHS 24

Tele: 111 - www.nhs24.com

NHS Tayside

Health Protection Team

Directorate of Public Health

Kings Cross

Cleington Road

Dundee

DD3 8EA

Website: www.taysidepublichealth.com



Tele: 01382 596976 or 596987

Further copies of this information are available or can be downloaded from the above NHS and local council. This information can be made available in Urdu, Chinese, Hindi, Arabic, large print, Braille or audio tape. Information in other languages and formats can be made available on request. Contact NHS Tayside Communications Department on 01382 424138.

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