

Advisory Note 26 E.Coli 0157 (Caterers and Food Handlers)

What is [E. coli 0157](#)?

E.coli are bacteria which live in the gut of both humans and animals. Most strains are harmless but some, like E.coli 0157 can cause diarrhoea in humans.

Why is E.coli dangerous?

Young children and the elderly can develop complications of kidney failure which can be fatal

A very low dose is able to cause illness – less than 100 organisms. Most bacteria have to be present in millions to cause symptoms.

How common is it?

In 1995 there were 792 cases reported in England and Wales. It is therefore very rare compared to 45,000 cases of food poisoning caused mainly by Salmonella and Campylobacter.

How do I control it?

The bacteria can get into meat during slaughter of cattle. It is destroyed by heat (cooking) but not by freezing or chilling. The bacteria can get into other foods by cross-contamination i.e. by contact with a surface previously in contact with raw beef.

The controls are therefore **Cooking** and **Separation of raw and cooked meats**.

What is the law?

Food Safety laws require all food business proprietors to identify steps in their activities which are critical to food safety and have in place controls. *Article 5, paragraph 1, EC (No.) 852/2004*

The **Critical steps** for the control of E.coli 0157 are the same as those for other food poisoning organisms i.e. separation and cooking.

The controls are temperature controlled storage, separation of raw and cooked foods, sanitisation and cleaning of surfaces and cooking food to high enough temperature.

Food handlers must be trained in safe practices. They should not work if suffering from diarrhoea and vomiting.

Burgers and Sausages

These must be cooked thoroughly. Checked with a clean knife that there is no red inside and the juices run clear

Joins of Beef

Check the cooking temperature with a probe thermometer. This should be 75°C or above

Steak

Can be served rare as the cut is unlikely to be contaminated but it is not advisable for the elderly or children

Vegetable/Salads

Potential contamination by farm effluent. Wash and peel where possible.

Most outbreaks have been linked to minced beef products and untreated (unpasteurised) milk. These foods are particularly risky.

**For further Advice/Information contact
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