



DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH

**News Release**

**LINDA LINGLE**  
GOVERNOR

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**DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH INVESTIGATING FOUR  
*E. COLI* O157:H7 CASES**

HONOLULU — The Hawaii State Department of Health is investigating four *E. coli* O157:H7 cases. The four cases had illness onsets between August 12 and 16, 2005. Three cases are Oahu residents, and one is a visitor who spent their exposure period on the islands of Oahu and Hawaii. All infections were locally acquired, but no common food or other exposure history has been identified. The investigation is ongoing.

*E. coli* O157:H7 is an emerging cause of foodborne illness. An estimated 73,000 cases of infection and 61 deaths occur in the United States each year. Infection often leads to bloody diarrhea and occasionally kidney failure. More information on *E. coli* O157:H7 is available at [www.cdc.gov/ncidod/dbmd/diseaseinfo/](http://www.cdc.gov/ncidod/dbmd/diseaseinfo/).

*E. coli* O157:H7 is one of hundreds of strains of the bacterium *Escherichia coli*. Although most strains are harmless and live in the intestines of healthy humans and animals, this strain produces a powerful toxin and can cause severe illness. Persons with bloody diarrhea with abdominal cramps should see their physician for possible *E. coli* O157:H7 testing.

Consumers can prevent *E. coli* O157:H7 infection by thoroughly cooking ground beef, avoiding unpasteurized milk, and washing hands carefully.

(more)

Cook all ground beef and hamburger thoroughly. Because ground beef can turn brown before disease-causing bacteria are killed, use a digital instant-read meat thermometer to ensure thorough cooking. Ground beef should be cooked until a thermometer inserted into several parts of the patty, including the thickest part, reads at least 160° F. Persons who cook ground beef without using a thermometer can decrease their risk of illness by not eating ground beef patties that are still pink in the middle.

If you are served an undercooked hamburger or other ground beef product in a restaurant, send it back for further cooking. You may also want to ask for a new bun and a clean plate.

Avoid spreading harmful bacteria in your kitchen. Keep raw meat separate from ready-to-eat foods. Wash hands, counters and utensils with hot soapy water after they touch raw meat. Never place cooked hamburgers or ground beef on the unwashed plate that held raw patties. Wash meat thermometers in between tests of patties that require further cooking.

Drink only pasteurized milk, juice, or cider. Commercial juice with an extended shelf-life that is sold at room temperature (e.g. juice in cardboard boxes, vacuum sealed juice in glass containers) has been pasteurized, although this is generally not indicated on the label. Juice concentrates are also heated sufficiently to kill pathogens.

Wash fruits and vegetables thoroughly, especially those that will not be cooked. Children under five years of age, immunocompromised persons, and the elderly should avoid eating alfalfa sprouts until their safety can be assured. Avoid swallowing lake or pool water while swimming.

Make sure that persons with diarrhea, especially children, wash their hands carefully with soap after bowel movements to reduce the risk of spreading infection, and that persons wash hands after changing soiled diapers. Anyone with a diarrhea illness should avoid swimming in public pools or lakes, sharing baths with others, and preparing food for others.

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