



Patient Instructions: Information about EHEC infection

You have been diagnosed with an intestinal infection caused by the EHEC bacteria. It is a generally hazardous communicable disease. Examinations, treatment, and all prescription medicines for EHEC are free of charge.

How does EHEC spread?

EHEC (short for enterohemorrhagic *Escherichia coli*) is a bacterium that is transmitted orally by eating contaminated food (such as uncooked ground meat, unwashed vegetables, unpasteurized milk), or by drinking or swimming in contaminated water. EHEC can also be contracted directly from animals, or from other people by hands. In Finland, all EHEC patients are interviewed to find the source of the infection.

Symptoms

The incubation period of the illness is 1–14 days (3–4 days on average). The symptoms include vomiting, stomach cramps and diarrhea with no fever. The diarrhea may also become bloody. The diarrhea usually lasts 4–10 days. The serious form of the illness, hemolytic uremic syndrome (HUS), develops in about 5–10% of patients and it may lead to renal insufficiency. Asymptomatic infections are especially common in adults. Adults carry the bacteria in their feces for about a week, but children carry the bacteria for several weeks.

Diagnostics and treatment

EHEC bacteria are diagnosed from a stool sample (F-BaktVIP). Generally, antibiotics are not recommended to treat EHEC infections. Patients with hemolytic uremic syndrome are treated in a hospital.

Preventing transmission

- Wash your hands with water and soap (liquid soap), especially after using the toilet and changing diapers, and before meals. Use a personal towel or disposable paper towels to dry your hands. If you cannot wash your hands, use hand disinfectant.
- If people living in the same household have several toilets available, it is recommended that one toilet is designated to the people with symptoms. If a child that uses diapers is ill, pack the used diapers in a separate plastic bag before taking them to the trash. Remember to maintain good hand hygiene.
- Do not prepare food for other people. Wash your dishes, the toilet, and laundry as usual. Laundry that is soiled with feces must be washed in at least 60° C.

Instructions to infected people and close contacts

- A child with symptoms of a stomach flu is not allowed in day care (early childhood education). A child with an EHEC infection may return to day care once the infection is confirmed to be over by follow-up tests. The communicable diseases unit in your wellbeing services county will provide you more detailed instructions on the follow-up tests.
- Under school-aged children infected with EHEC are not allowed at public pools or water parks while they have symptoms and for one month after the symptoms have ended.
- If an infected person works in an at-risk profession (e.g. food industry, care for the elderly or newborn babies), the communicable diseases unit in your wellbeing services county will provide you more detailed instructions on the follow-up tests, returning to work, or rearrangement of your work.
- Generally, people with symptoms of a stomach flu should not go to school or work (when not in an at-risk profession), until 48 hours after the symptoms have stopped. Follow-up samples are not needed.
- Close contacts of an infected person will need to provide a stool sample if they have symptoms of an EHEC infection. Based on a risk assessment, even asymptomatic close contacts can be tested.

Further information in Finnish

- www.thl.fi EHEC