

# VTEC (Vero cytotoxin-producing *Escherichia coli*) or *E.coli* 0157

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## What is VTEC or *E.coli* 0157?

VTEC (Vero cytotoxin producing *Escherichia coli*) is a bacteria that can cause a severe diarrhoeal illness. The 0157 strain is the most common in the UK.

## What are the symptoms of VTEC and how long do they last?

People infected with VTEC can have a combination of the following symptoms:

- Diarrhoea (about 50% of cases have bloody diarrhoea)
- Stomach cramps
- Fever.

Some people may have mild diarrhoea or even no symptoms at all.

Symptoms can last for up to two weeks in cases without complications.

A small proportion of patients develop more serious complications.

## How do you get infected with VTEC?

Cattle are the most common source of VTEC 0157 in the UK although VTEC have also been found in the faeces of a range of animals, including deer, rabbits, horses, pigs and wild birds.

People can become infected by:

- Eating contaminated food (see below – How can I avoid being infected?).
- Contact with infected animals, either directly or through inadvertent contact with animal faeces (e.g. at farms, petting farms and campsites).
- Contact with other people who have the illness, (i.e. through inadequate hand hygiene after using the toilet and/or before food handling – particularly in households, nurseries and infant schools).
- Drinking water from inadequately treated water supplies.
- Swimming or playing in contaminated water, such as ponds or streams.

## Is it infectious?

VTEC are very infectious. Only a few bacteria are needed to cause illness. This means that disease can spread easily within families and other settings such as nurseries, infant schools, nursing homes and hospitals where there are young children and others who might have difficulty in keeping clean.

Infected food handlers pose a risk of contaminating food products and must be excluded from work to avoid spreading infection.

If you are told you have a VTEC infection, you should tell your employer if you work with vulnerable groups such as the elderly, the young, those in poor health and if you handle food.

## How do you treat VTEC?

There is no specific treatment for VTEC infection.

The illness will usually clear itself within a week. It is important to drink plenty of fluids as diarrhoea can lead to dehydration.

Antibiotics are not recommended, and are likely to increase the risk of getting complications.

Whilst an inpatient at the James Paget University Hospital you will be isolated in a side room until you are 48 hours clear of symptoms or able to go home.

## **Do you need to stay off work or school?**

Once you have been discharged you should be excluded from work/ school or other institutional settings until 48hrs after you have stopped vomiting or having diarrhoea.

In the following cases, you may need to have a stool specimen screened to confirm you are negative for VTEC prior to returning to work/school.

These are:

- Those that cannot ensure personal hygiene at home, work or school
- Those attending pre-school groups or nurseries
- Those that prepare or serve unwrapped food that is not heated further
- Healthcare workers with direct contact to highly susceptible patients, or patients for whom an infection like VTEC could have serious consequences.

## **Will I have to stay in hospital until VTEC has cleared?**

You do not usually have to stay in hospital until VTEC infection has cleared if you are able to care for yourself and maintain your fluid intake.

## **How will this affect my visitors?**

- Visitors are allowed as normal.
- If a visitor has assisted you with any personal care they will be required to wear gloves and aprons and wash their hands with soap and water.
- Please do not allow visitors to sit or lie on your bed.

## **What happens when I go home?**

- You may be discharged from hospital before your infection is cleared.
- If someone in the family has VTEC infection, wash all dirty clothes, bedding and towels in the washing machine on the hottest cycle possible. Clean toilet seats, toilet bowls, flush handles, taps, hand basins and any other areas that might have been soiled, with detergent and hot water, rinsing with household disinfectant.
- Do not use gels or wipes instead of washing hands with soap and water. Gels and wipes do not remove VTEC. Supervise children closely to ensure that they wash their hands thoroughly.

## **How can I avoid getting infected with VTEC in the future?**

Very few bacteria (possibly fewer than 100 individual cells) can cause disease and it is important to observe good hygiene practices relating to food/drink and animals and their environment. That means:

- Cook all meat products (i.e. burgers, meatloaf, meat balls etc.) thoroughly, until the colour is the same all the way through, and no blood runs from them.
- Ensure refrigerators are working correctly – bacteria grow more quickly at temperatures over 4°C
- Only leave cooked foods, meat and dairy products out at room temperature for a short time

- Store uncooked meats on a shelf below cooked meats and salad vegetables to avoid contamination
- Store uncooked and cooked meats on different plates, avoiding all contact between raw and cooked meats
- Thoroughly wash all salad vegetables and do not prepare them with utensils that have also been used for raw meat
- Children and the elderly, who are particularly susceptible to the severe effects of VTEC, should avoid eating or drinking unpasteurised dairy products
- People who have been ill should not prepare food for others for at least 48 hours after they have recovered
- Boil any drinking water if you are unsure of its source
- Do not swim in water that you think may be contaminated by cattle and sheep in nearby fields
- Wash your hands using soap and water thoroughly after using the toilet (or helping others including changing nappies), handling raw meat, before meals and after contact with animals.

### Further Information:

Please speak to an Infection Prevention & Control Nurse.


The Infection Prevention Team

Telephone: 01493 453136

### Feedback

We want your visit to be as comfortable as possible. Please talk to the person in charge if you have any concerns. If the ward/department staff are unable to resolve your concern, please ask for our Patient Advice and Liaison (PALS) information. Please be assured that raising a concern will not impact on your care. **Before you leave the hospital you will be asked to complete a Friends and Family Test feedback card.** Providing your feedback is vital in helping to transform NHS services and to support patient choice.

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| <b>Trust Values</b> | <p>Courtesy and respect</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• A welcoming and positive attitude</li> <li>• Polite, friendly and interested in people</li> <li>• Value and respect people as individuals</li> </ul> <p>So people feel <b>welcome</b></p>                            | <p>Responsive communication</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Listen to people &amp; answer their questions</li> <li>• Keep people clearly informed</li> <li>• Involve people</li> </ul> <p>So people feel <b>in control</b></p>                              |
|                     | <p>Attentively kind and helpful</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Look out for dignity, privacy &amp; humanity</li> <li>• Attentive, responsive &amp; take time to help</li> <li>• Visible presence of staff to provide care</li> </ul> <p>So people feel <b>cared for</b></p> | <p>Effective and professional</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Safe, knowledgeable and reassuring</li> <li>• Effective care / services from joined up teams</li> <li>• Organised and timely, looking to improve</li> </ul> <p>So people feel <b>safe</b></p> |

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|  | <p>The hospital can arrange for an interpreter or person to sign to assist you in communicating effectively with staff during your stay. Please let us know.</p> |
| <p><b>For a large print version of this leaflet, contact PALS 01493 453240</b></p>  |  |