

VTEC/STEC

What is VTEC/STEC?

VTEC/STEC is short for verotoxin or shiga toxin producing *Escherichia coli*. *Escherichia coli* are one type of bacteria found in the intestines of humans and animals. Most types of bacteria are harmless, but some types such as VTEC/STEC can cause severe illness by producing powerful poisons.

How do you catch VTEC/STEC?

- eating undercooked meat
- drinking unpasteurised milk
- drinking unsafe water
- contact with people who have the illness
- not washing and drying hands carefully
- contact with some farm animals or animal faeces (mainly calves and cows)

How can I prevent getting infected?

- Wash hands with soapy water for 20 seconds, then dry well with a clean cloth or paper towel every time:
 - after going to the toilet
 - before preparing food, eating or drinking
 - after changing babies nappies
- Prepare food and drink safely
- Fully cook minced meat such as beef burgers or meatloaf so they are brown in colour all the way through, and no blood runs out
- Never put cooked food back on a plate which has had fresh uncooked meat on it
- Carefully wash all salads and vegetables that will be eaten raw
- Do not to eat and drink unpasteurised milk or dairy foods
- Boil any drinking water if you are unsure of its source or safety.

How do you know for sure you have VTEC/STEC?

Some people may not have any symptoms, but if you feel or get:

- stomach pains
- vomiting
- bloody diarrhoea
- body feels hot

These symptoms begin 2 to 8 days after exposure to bacteria and can last one week. People can pass on the illness up to 3 weeks afterwards.

What should I do if I think I have VTEC/STEC?

- Visit your doctor.
- Explain what your symptoms are.
- If your doctor thinks you have VTEC/STEC they will ask for a faeces sample.
- This will confirm whether you have VTEC/STEC or not.

What more can I do to prevent VTEC/STEC?

- Ideally wash hands with soapy water for 20 seconds, then dry well with a clean cloth or paper towel:
 - before preparing food and before eating
 - after using the toilet, gardening, changing children's nappies, or touching pets or other animals
- Children on farms need to be reminded to wash and dry their hands regularly.
- If somebody in your family has this disease, it is important they wash with soap and dry their hands carefully and frequently to avoid spreading the germs.

When can I go back to work, school or daycare?

- Anyone with diarrhoea, even if the reason is not known, should not go to work, school or daycare until they have been free of symptoms for 2 days.
- Children should stay away from daycare or school until tests show they are free of the bacteria.
- Adults whose job involves preparing food, working at a daycare centre, or in healthcare should not go back until two stool samples (taken more than 48 hours apart) and show no signs of VTEC/STEC.

For further information contact the Auckland Regional Public Health Service on 09 623 4600

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