



DEPARTMENT OF ENVIRONMENTAL HEALTH County of Riverside

INFORMATIONAL BULLETIN NO. 13-94-DES

DISTRICT ENVIRONMENTAL SERVICES DIVISION

E. COLI AND GROUND BEEF

A person can contract serious bacterial gastroenteritis by consuming undercooked ground beef. Scientists have identified the dangerous type of bacterium called *Escherichia coli* 0157:H7 that is responsible for this food borne illness. Most strains of *E. coli* are normal inhabitants of the digestive tract, but this strain produces toxins in the intestine that are capable of causing serious illness. Cattle and people are believed to be the reservoir of this bacterium.

In 1993, for example, *E. coli* 0157:H7 was the cause of over 500 cases of serious illness and 3 deaths. Most of the infected people had eaten undercooked hamburgers at a well-known nationwide fast food chain.

Controlling *E. coli* in Food Preparation

Although techniques to ensure food safety are constantly improving, raw foods will never be bacteria free and the role of the consumer in proper food preparation will remain vital. You can guard against all harmful pathogens by following these safety tips.

- Thorough cooking can destroy *E. coli* 0157:H7. Cooking to at least 155°F for 15 seconds or to 157 °F internal temperature can kill *E. coli*.
- When eating out, **SEND BACK** any meat product that does not appear thoroughly cooked.
- Reheat leftovers to 165°F internal temperature.
- Keep meat refrigerated at 41°F or below. Use ground beef within one to two days after you purchase it or freeze it at 0°F. Cold temperatures slow down bacterial growth.
- Thaw meat in the refrigerator, not on the kitchen counter, where it's warm enough for bacteria to multiply.
- Store raw meat on a platter on the bottom shelf in the refrigerator to prevent meat juices from dripping onto other foods and contaminating them.
- Don't serve or cut cooked meat on a platter that held raw meat. Don't partially cook meat ahead of time. Bacteria can grow in partially cooked meat as it cools, even after you first put it into the refrigerator.
- Use hot soapy water to wash hands, utensils, and cutting boards that have come into contact with raw meat.
- Wash hands thoroughly after using the restroom.

Call USDA's Meat and Poultry Hotline at (888) 674-6854 for more information.

*Document available in an alternate format upon request

OFFICES IN: RIVERSIDE, BLYTHE, CORONA, HEMET, INDIO, MURRIETA AND PALM SPRINGS

For more information call (888) 722-4234

Department Web Site – www.rivcoeh.org