

Infection Prevention and You



Stay safe from stomach bugs at the country fair

Do your autumn plans include a trip to a country fair? Spending a day at the fair is fun, but it's important to make hand hygiene an important part of your day, especially if you will be coming into contact with certain animals.

E. coli O157:H7 infections are associated with animal contact at fairs, petting zoos, or animal exhibition halls. *E. coli* O157:H7 is commonly found in cattle, goats, and sheep. Outbreaks associated with these animals are common. People who contact these animals at any venue, public or private, are at risk for infection with *E. coli* O157:H7 as well as a variety of other germs including *Salmonella* and *Campylobacter*.

How germs are spread

People typically become ill by getting germs on their hands after touching the animals or contaminated surfaces, and then swallowing the germs while eating, drinking, or during other hand-to-mouth activities. Germs that can make you sick can be present on the fur, or in the saliva of the animals, in the soil where these animals are kept, or on surfaces such as fence railings of animal pens.

Signs and symptoms

Symptoms of *E. coli* O157:H7 illness typically include severe stomach cramps and diarrhea, often with bloody stools, but only a low-grade or no fever. People typically become ill 2 to 5 days after exposure, but this time period can range from 1 to at least 8 days. Most people recover in 5 to 10 days; however, *E. coli* O157:H7 infections sometimes lead to hemolytic uremic syndrome (HUS), a complication of *E. coli* that can lead to kidney failure. HUS most commonly affects children and the elderly. Diarrhea associated with an *E. coli* O157:H7 infection should NOT be treated with antibiotics, as this practice can promote the development of HUS.

How to prevent the risk of infection

Risk associated with animal contact can be reduced through the following measures:

- Visitors to animal exhibits should be made aware that even healthy, well-tended animals can have germs that can make people seriously ill.
- Food, drinks, and items that promote hand-to-mouth contact (for example, pacifiers) should not be brought into animal areas.
- Hands should be washed with soap and water immediately after visiting the animals. Hand sanitizers are not a substitute for soap and running water but may afford some protection until soap and water are available. They do not work well against some germs and when hands are visibly soiled.

Children under 5 years of age, seniors, pregnant women, and people with chronic health conditions or a weakened immune system are at risk for serious complications from *E. coli* infections and should take extra care around animals.

Additional resources

CDC — *E. coli* <http://www.cdc.gov/ecoli/>

CDC — Stay Healthy at Animal Exhibits This Fall <http://www.cdc.gov/features/animalexhibits/>

Minnesota Department of Health — “Health officials link *E. coli* O157 infections to traveling petting zoo” <http://www.health.state.mn.us/news/pressrel/2014/ecoli081214.html>

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