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Updated : 1 November 2012

Why you should take note

Products contaminated with *E. coli* O157 can pose a serious public health risk.

To date, the Public Health Agency of Canada has been working with its health and food safety partners on an investigation into *E. coli* O157 illnesses that have been linked to the food safety investigation at XL Foods Inc.



Today, one additional case of *E. coli* O157 illness under investigation in Quebec has been confirmed to be the same specific strain of *E. coli* O157 observed in the XL Foods Inc. food safety investigation. This individual became ill in early October and has since recovered.

Status

Investigations into outbreaks of foodborne illness can be complex. Since September 26, 2012, the Agency has been leading a committee that includes public health and food safety experts from the Canadian Food Inspection Agency, Health Canada and Provincial and Territorial Health Authorities. The committee meets regularly to share and review the latest information and determine what actions should be taken to protect Canadians.

Based on all the information collected to date - epidemiological, microbiological and food safety - the following cases of illness are linked to the specific strain of *E. coli* O157 observed in the XL Foods Inc., food safety investigation.

Province / Territory	Total confirmed cases
Alberta	7
Newfoundland and Labrador	1
Quebec	6
British Columbia	3*
Total	17
* One case is a visitor to Canada.	

More information about [products that have been recalled](#)  and how that aspect of the investigation has unfolded, including the temporary closure of Establishment 38, is available on the [CFIA website](#) .

E. coli O157 foodborne illnesses are not uncommon in Canada and no unusual increases in the number of these illnesses have been detected nationally.

What you should do

Most strains of *E. coli* are harmless; however, some strains, such as *E. coli* O157:H7, can make people sick, causing severe stomach cramps, diarrhea and vomiting. Serious complications of an *E. coli* O157:H7 infection can include kidney failure.

If you think you are sick with an *E. coli* O157:H7 infection, consult a healthcare professional.

Symptoms of an *E. coli* O157:H7 infection

Like other foodborne illnesses, the symptoms of *E. coli* infection mainly involve the gut. Symptoms may vary from person to person; however, they often include:

- severe stomach cramps;
- diarrhea (often watery and may develop into bloody);
- vomiting; and
- fever (generally not very high - usually less than 38.5°C/101°F).

Symptoms usually last five to seven days.

Around 5 to 10 per cent of those who get sick from *E. coli* O157:H7 overall and about 15 per cent of young children and the elderly develop hemolytic uremic syndrome (HUS), which can be fatal. Symptoms of HUS vary. Some people have seizures or strokes and some need blood transfusions and kidney dialysis. Others live with side effects such as permanent kidney damage.


Who is most at risk?

Infections can occur among people of all ages, however symptoms are likely to be more severe among the very young and the elderly. Pregnant women and people with weakened immune systems are also at high risk of developing serious complications.

How to protect yourself

Proper hygiene and safe food handling and preparation practices are key to preventing the spread of all foodborne illnesses, including *E. coli*.

Hand washing is one of the best ways to prevent the spread of foodborne illness.

Contaminated foods may look and smell normal. It is important to ensure that you thoroughly cook foods to destroy bacteria. [Recalled products](#) , however, should not be consumed and should be thrown away.

General food safety

Everyone should practice these [general food safety precautions](#) at all times.

Additional information

The Canadian Food Inspection Agency's [information about this investigation, including recalls](#) 

The Public Health Agency of Canada's [E. coli O157:H7 fact sheet](#)

The Public Health Agency of Canada's [Anatomy of a Foodborne Illness Outbreak](#)

The Public Health Agency of Canada's video series, [Something you ate?](#)

The Government of Canada [food safety web portal](#) 

Date Modified: 2012-11-01