

NORTH CENTRAL HEALTH DISTRICT AND DEPARTMENT OF PUBLIC HEALTH INVESTIGATING E.COLI CASES LINKED TO GEORGIA NATIONAL FAIR

Posted October 28, 2021 by [Michael Hokanson](#)

North Central Health District (NCHD) and the Department of Public Health (DPH) are working with the staff of the Georgia National Fairgrounds & Agricenter to investigate cases of E.coli in attendees of the Georgia National Fair.

As of Oct. 28, NCHD and DPH have identified four cases of shiga-toxin producing E.coli (STEC) infection in attendees of the Georgia National Fair in Perry, which was held Oct. 7-17. All 4 confirmed cases are in children that reside in counties across the state of Georgia, and three of these cases have been hospitalized. Of the four cases, one has been confirmed to be E.coli O157:H7. NCHD and DPH epidemiologists are just beginning the investigation. Moving forward, the investigation will include case identification, laboratory testing, community surveying to assess risk factors/source of infection and more.

Anyone that attended the fair can help by completing the following survey:

- **Survey has been closed.**

Epidemiologists ask each person that visited the Georgia National Fair between Thursday, Oct. 7 and Sunday, Oct. 17, to complete the survey, even if they did not become ill. All information provided to public health will remain confidential in accordance with HIPAA practices. Information will be used to investigate and determine what could have caused illness by comparing activities between those who became sick and those who did not. A map of the fairgrounds is included below to aid in survey completion.

What is STEC?

E.coli is a large family of bacteria; most strains of E.coli are harmless, but some can lead to illness. STEC, shiga toxin-producing E.coli, cause illness by producing toxin. The most commonly identified STEC in North America is E.coli O157:H7.

How is STEC transmitted?

STEC infects a person most commonly when the individual ingests contaminated material. Contamination is usually caused by tiny particles of human or animal excrement. Exposures that lead to illness include eating contaminated food, drinking unpasteurized milk, drinking water that has not been disinfected, contact with live animals or contact with the feces of infected people. Examples of infection sources include petting zoos and animal exhibits, swallowing lake water while swimming or eating food prepared by people who did not wash their hands thoroughly after using the restroom. Almost everyone has some risk of infection.

What are symptoms of STEC?

STEC can lead to different symptoms for each person, but common symptoms include stomach cramps, diarrhea, vomiting and mild fever. Symptoms of STEC usually appear between three and four days, but incubation can last up to 10 days before symptoms. Most individuals recover within a week. Some infections are mild, but others may be severe or life-threatening. Very young children, elderly adults and people with chronic medical conditions have a higher risk of severe outcomes.

How can I treat STEC?

There is no specific treatment for STEC. Supportive therapy, especially hydration, is important. Antibiotics should not be used to treat infection.

What can I do to prevent STEC transmission?

You can reduce your risk of STEC prevention by following these practices:

- Wash your hands thoroughly after using the restroom, changing diapers, interacting with animals and before preparing or eating food.
- Cook meats thoroughly.
- Avoid raw milk and unpasteurized dairy products or juices.

- Do not swallow water from lakes, rivers, ponds or swimming pools.
- Prevent contamination when preparing food by keeping raw meats away from other ingredients. Use different cutting boards and utensils after handling raw meat.
- If you are ill:
 - stay away from work, school or physical activities.
 - Do not handle or prepare food for anyone but yourself.
 - Wait at least 48 hours after symptoms disappear before returning to your regular schedule.
 - If symptoms do not disappear, or if they get worse, contact your healthcare provider.
- If you are caring for someone who is ill:
 - practice proper hand hygiene.
 - handle and dispose of the ill individual's waste properly.
 - wash any soiled clothing or linens that may be contaminated.
 - disinfect contaminated surfaces.