

County News

Confirmed E. coli Outbreak at Huntley High School

Post Date: 09/21/2023 4:30 PM

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JOINT PRESS RELEASE

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HUNTLEY, IL - The McHenry County Department of Health (MCDH) and Huntley Community School District 158 are working collaboratively to respond to a recent outbreak of Shiga Toxin-Producing E. coli (STEC) at Huntley High School. There are currently six confirmed cases of STEC, all of which involve students. The first case was identified on Sunday, September 17. At this time, there is insufficient evidence to indicate the source of the illness. The MCDH is actively monitoring for potential cases; there are no other known McHenry County STEC cases outside of this outbreak.

In a letter to parents, students, and staff, Huntley Community School District 158 officials reiterated that the situation is being taken seriously and that the safety and well-being of students and staff is of the utmost importance.

Huntley High School officials are fully cooperating with the MCDH as they continue their investigation into potential exposures, both internally and externally, as the source of the outbreak has not yet been identified.

Given the highly contagious nature of E. coli, students are strongly encouraged to practice frequent handwashing. In addition to this, Huntley High School science teachers have been providing students with essential information about E. coli. Furthermore, the school has taken proactive measures to ensure a safe

environment, including the posting of handwashing signage throughout the school and the provision of readily accessible hand sanitizer stations in all classrooms and common areas.

STEC is a bacterial infection known to cause gastrointestinal illness in humans. This strain of E. coli bacteria grows and lives in the intestines of people and animals. Transmission of STEC can occur due to contact with contaminated food, contaminated water, people, and animals. Symptoms and characteristics of STEC include:

- Diarrhea (often bloody)
- Fever
- Abdominal cramping and body aches
- Vomiting
- Headaches

Symptoms typically start within 3-4 days of exposure to STEC but may take up to 10 days to develop. Most individuals infected with STEC feel better within 5-10 days from the onset of the illness with rest fluids.

To prevent and stop the spread of infection, the MCDH recommends washing hands with soap and water when preparing and eating food, having contact with animals or their environment, and after bathroom use or changing a diaper; avoiding swallowing water from ponds, lakes, and untreated swimming pools; and washing and cooking foods properly and avoid unpasteurized (raw) dairy products and juices. Those infected should not handle, prepare, or cook food for others until 48 hours after symptoms have resolved.

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