

Shiga toxin-producing *E. coli* O121 infections associated with Wonder Coffee and Sports Bar in Seattle

AT-A-GLANCE

Cases	2
Hospitalizations	0
Deaths	0
Status	Investigation is ongoing
Location	Wonder Coffee and Sports Bar 1800 S Jackson St E, Seattle, WA 98144
Illness Onset Date Range	July 12 – July 16, 2024
Meal Date Range	July 10, 2024
Current Inspection Rating	OKAY

Highlights, posted August 6, 2024

Summary

Public Health is investigating an outbreak of Shiga toxin-producing *E. coli* O121 (also known as STEC).

Based on information collected, both people likely became sick after eating food from Wonder Coffee and Sports Bar. Both people ate foods that could have made them sick, including raw or undercooked beef, or other foods that may have been contaminated by raw or undercooked beef. Even though we think this is the most likely source of how both people got sick, we do not know for certain. We are still investigating how the beef might have been contaminated with STEC.

This investigation is ongoing.

Illnesses

Since July 24, 2024, Public Health has learned about two people who got sick during July 12 and July 17. Both people had symptoms of STEC, including diarrhea (often bloody), stomach cramping, nausea, and vomiting. We have not found any Wonder Coffee and Sports Bar restaurant workers sick with symptoms of STEC.

Public Health actions

Disease Investigators talked with the two sick people to try and find what could have made them sick with STEC and prevent ongoing spread of STEC. On July 25, Environmental Health Investigators visited Wonder Coffee and Sports Bar. Investigators identified potential risk factors, including poor handwashing facilities, improperly cleaned food processing equipment, and improper separation of raw and ready-to-eat foods. Investigators provided education about preventing the spread of STEC — including proper handwashing, preventing bare hand contact with ready-to-eat foods, preventing cross contamination between raw meat and ready-to-eat food during food preparation, and making sure restaurant staff know to stay home when feeling sick with symptoms related to STEC. When restaurant staff have STEC, they need further testing before going back to work to make sure they cannot give STEC to someone else. No sick restaurant staff were identified at the time of the restaurant inspections.

Environmental Health Investigators revisited the restaurant on July 29, to make sure that proper compliance with cleaning, disinfection, and correct handwashing practices are in place.

Laboratory testing

Two people who became sick had testing that was positive for the same strain of STEC (O121).

About STEC

E. coli germs (bacteria) normally live in the intestines (gut) of humans and animals. Many strains of *E. coli* bacteria exist, and most of them are harmless or beneficial to human health. STEC are strains of *E. coli* that produce Shiga toxin (such as *E. coli* O121) and can make people very sick.

STEC infections can happen when eating raw or undercooked ground beef and other beef products; unpasteurized (raw) milk, cheese, and juice; contaminated raw fruits, vegetables, sprouts, and herbs; water contaminated with animal feces (poop), or by direct contact with farm animals or their environment. Ready-to-eat foods can also be contaminated with STEC through contact with raw beef or raw beef juices in the kitchen.

STEC and other foodborne infections occur throughout the year but may increase during late spring and summer months.

Symptoms of STEC include diarrhea (which often becomes bloody) and stomach cramps, with mild or no fever. Illness typically lasts several days and people can spread infection to others even after symptoms resolve.

- STEC infections usually resolve in 5–7 days but people may still spread the bacteria in their poop when no longer sick. Up to 33% of children may continue to shed STEC in their poop for as long as 3 weeks after they are no longer sick.
- Around 5–10% of people who are diagnosed with a STEC infection can have a potentially life-threatening complication known as hemolytic uremic syndrome (HUS). Clues that a person is developing HUS include decreased frequency of urination (peeing) and feeling very tired. People with HUS should be hospitalized because their kidneys may stop working and they may develop other serious problems. Most people with HUS get better in a few weeks, but some suffer permanent damage or die.
- Sick people with suspected STEC infection should not work in food handling (like restaurants), patient care (like hospitals), or childcare/daycare, and sick children with suspected STEC infection should not go to daycare/childcare until they have seen a healthcare provider (doctor) and been tested for STEC infection, even if their sickness is mild. People with STEC infections who work in food handling (like restaurants), patient care, or childcare/daycare or go to childcare/daycare must be cleared by Public Health before returning.

Prevention

General advice for reducing risk of getting STEC:

- Avoid eating high-risk foods, especially undercooked ground beef and other beef products, goat products, and sheep products, unpasteurized (raw) milk or juice or cheese, and raw sprouts.
- Wash hands with soap and water before preparing food for yourself or your children, before eating food, after handling raw meats, after going to the bathroom or changing diapers, and after contact with cows, sheep, or goats, their food or treats, or their living environment.
- If soap and water aren't available, use an alcohol-based hand sanitizer with at least 60% alcohol (check the product label to be sure). These alcohol-based products can quickly kill the number of germs on hands sometimes, but they cannot replace washing with soap and running water.
- Wash fresh produce very well before eating.
- If washing "pre-washed" or "ready to eat" produce items like bags of salad mix, be sure it does not come into contact with unclean surfaces or utensils.
- Wash cutting boards and areas used for meat or poultry (like chicken) preparation immediately after use to avoid cross contaminating other foods.

- Cook all meats until well done, especially ground beef. Use a food thermometer to make sure meats have reached a safe internal temperature.