

Outbreak of *E. coli* foodborne illness in Germany

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There is currently an outbreak of food borne illness caused by a specific strain of the bacteria *Escherichia coli*. Often referred to as EHEC, the illness is occurring among the civilian population in northern Germany. Consuming food or water that has been contaminated with these bacteria can cause bloody diarrhea and abdominal cramps. In some cases, these bacteria can cause a severe, potentially life-threatening form of the disease called hemolytic uremic syndrome (HUS).

According to the Robert Koch Institute, Germany's national disease control and prevention agency, recently there have been hundreds of illnesses caused by EHEC. This includes at least 214 cases of HUS and two deaths. No cases have been reported in the U.S. military community. The source of the bacteria is uncertain; however, German health officials have implicated raw vegetables as a potential source. Past outbreaks of these types of *E. coli* have involved several different food products. These include ground beef, vegetables, fruits, raw milk, and water.

People can become ill after consuming contaminated food that has not been properly prepared or cooked. Generally, children less than five years of age, elderly people, and individuals with other illnesses have the highest risk for developing the more serious forms of the illness.

Until more information is released by German public health officials, Public Health Command Region – Europe and Europe Regional Medical Command health officials encourage everyone to practice safe food preparation practices. Those practices include washing hands before preparing food and before eating, storing food at proper temperatures, cooking food to proper temperatures, washing fruits and vegetables prior to eating and not allowing cooked food to contact raw food or dirty utensils.

If German health officials identify a specific food product as the source of this outbreak, Public Health Command Region-Europe will communicate the food safety risk through military-related news media and command channels.

Persons who develop diarrhea should practice strict hand hygiene, drink plenty of fluids and monitor their stools for the presence of visible blood. Those who have health concerns and develop a foodborne illness should contact their primary healthcare provider. Anyone with bloody diarrhea should see their provider or seek medical care promptly.

For more information:

Safe food handling fact sheets for vegetables and fruits are available at:

<http://www.fda.gov/food/resourcesforyou/consumers/ucm114299>

Safe food handling fact sheets for meat products are available at
http://www.fsis.usda.gov/factsheets/safe_food_handling_fact_sheets/index.asp

An overview of information regarding enterohemorrhagic *E. coli* can be found at:
http://www.cdc.gov/nczved/divisions/dfbmd/diseases/enterohemorrhagic_ecoli/technical.html