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## Health Inspectors Remind Everyone to BBQ Safely

Hamburger Disease is the common name for the type of food poisoning caused by E. coli - the infamous bacteria that created a lot of fear after the Walkerton tainted-water tragedy. *"But we don't have to live in fear",* says Brad Colpitts of the Canadian Institute of Public Health Inspectors. *"Preventing an E. coli infection from food is easy enough. It just takes a little knowledge and awareness in the kitchen and around the barbecue."*

Verotoxigenic E. coli (or VTEC) is a potentially hazardous strain that can cause illness, permanent kidney damage or even death. People who become infected with this bacterium frequently report that they ate ground beef prior to their illness. For this reason, the disease has been dubbed "hamburger disease" or "BBQ Syndrome". However, ground beef is only one source of VTEC. People have also become ill after eating other kinds of undercooked meats, or drinking unpasteurized milk or unchlorinated water.

Most people who become infected with VTEC feel like they have a bad case of the 'stomach flu', while others can experience severe or even life threatening symptoms. Two to ten days after eating food contaminated with VTEC, people may experience severe stomach cramps, vomiting and a mild fever. People experiencing the severe form of the disease will develop watery diarrhea, which may lead to hemorrhagic colitis (bloody diarrhea). Most people recover within 7 to 10 days. *"Proper handling and cooking of food can practically eliminate the risk from E.coli, Salmonella and other harmful microbes.",* says Colpitts. *"In fact, people can take charge of protecting their health – and the health of their family this summer – by following these simple precautions:*

**Keep Hot Foods Hot & Cold Foods Cold:** Refrigerate or freeze meat after purchase; thaw meat in the refrigerator, not at room temperature; eat cooked foods while they are still hot; and refrigerate leftover foods as soon as possible.

**Careful Preparation:** Always wash your hands with soap before & after handling raw meats. Avoid cross-contamination by placing cooked meats on clean plates. Food should not come into contact with raw or uncooked foods or juices.

**Thorough Cooking:** Hamburgers and other meats should be cooked thoroughly. Ideally, a thermometer should be used to make sure the internal temperature gets up above 71°C (160°F). If you don't have a thermometer, make sure the meat is "well done" until the core is brown and the juices run clear. Poultry should be cooked to 82°C (180°F). Poultry may need to be par-boiled before going on the grill. There should be no pink near the bone.

**Cleaning Up:** Dishes, cutting boards and counters need to be washed with hot, soapy water and then sanitized with diluted bleach after handling meat. A teaspoon of household bleach to a gallon of water will provide enough sanitizer.

**For media inquiries, please contact:**  
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For more information, visit the Health Canada website at:  
<http://www.hc-sc.gc.ca/english/iyh/food/hamburger.html>

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