

FactSheet

Para Su Información

Enterotoxigenic Escherichia Coli (ETEC)

What is ETEC?

Enterotoxigenic Escherichia coli (ETEC) are bacteria that cause disease in humans and domestic animals by producing a heat labile or heat stable toxin or both. The disease is also known as "Traveler's Diarrhea." Although ETEC is a frequent cause of diarrhea in developing countries, it is an uncommon cause of outbreaks in the United States.

How does a person become infected with ETEC?

ETEC are found in the stool of an infected person or animal. If the bacteria get into food or water consumed by a susceptible person, symptoms consistent with the disease may develop.

What are the symptoms of ETEC?

The main characteristic of the disease is a watery diarrhea. It begins about 14 to 50 hours after the bacteria have been ingested. The diarrhea may be mild and last only a few days or it may be more severe and prolonged, lasting up to 3 weeks. Generally the diarrhea does not contain blood or mucus. Other symptoms include abdominal cramps, low-grade fever, nausea, headache and muscle aches.

How can ETEC be diagnosed?

There are many causes of diarrhea. Stool cultures and other tests should be obtained to eliminate the more common causes of diarrhea such as Campylobacter, Salmonella, Shigella, E.coli 0157:H7 or viruses. Specific laboratory tests for ETEC are not widely available at commercial laboratories. Specialized laboratories including those at the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention are able to identify this organism.

How can ETEC be treated?

Most people recover from this infection without antibiotics or specific treatment. Electrolyte fluid replacement is most commonly used to prevent or treat dehydration. Most cases do not require any other therapy. With severe illness in adults, treatment with antibiotics and other medications may be necessary. A physician should be consulted for treatment of illness in children or adults with severe diarrhea.

Where can I get more information?

Contact your doctor or the Southern Nevada Health District, Office of Epidemiology at (702) 759-1300.



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