

Hemolytic Uremic Syndrome (HUS)

Fact Sheet



Maine Center for Disease
Control and Prevention
An Office of the
Department of Health and Human Services

What is Hemolytic Uremic Syndrome (HUS)?

HUS is a complication of some diarrheal infections. Shiga-toxin producing bacteria like *E. coli* O157:H7 and *Shigella* are the bacteria that usually cause HUS.

What are the symptoms of HUS?

The first symptom is diarrhea. The diarrhea may be bloody. Clues that a person is developing HUS include decreased frequency of urination, feeling very tired, and losing pink color in cheeks and inside the lower eyelids. Symptoms of HUS occur 7 days after diarrhea starts.

The bacteria can make toxins that destroy red blood cells, causing anemia. The blood pressure and body fluid levels are not normal. The kidneys can fail.

How is it spread?

HUS is not spread from person to person because it is a complication of other illness. The bacteria that cause the diarrhea can be passed from person to person, in contaminated food and water and by contact with animals, like cows. The bacteria can be passed on for weeks after the diarrhea stops. It can take as long as ten days to become sick after being exposed to the bacteria.

Who gets HUS?

Children less than five years old and the elderly are more likely to develop HUS after having diarrhea.

How is HUS diagnosed?

People with HUS are very sick. The doctors will measure the number of red blood cells, keep the blood pressure and body fluids balanced and watch how the kidneys are working.

How is HUS treated?

People with HUS are usually treated in the hospital. They may be given blood transfusions to replace the red blood cells that have been destroyed. They may also be given help breathing and/or undergo dialysis to do the work of the kidneys.

How can you prevent HUS?

HUS can be prevented by avoiding *E. coli* O157:H7, *Shigella*, and other similar infections. You can do this by:

- Washing your hands carefully after using the bathroom and changing diapers, and before handling or eating any food.
- Keeping food areas clean. Wash surfaces, utensils, and cookware after touching raw meat.
- Drinking pasteurized milk, juice, and cider.
- Cooking meat thoroughly. Hamburger should have no pink in the middle.
- Cooking and serving foods at the correct temperature. Defrost frozen food in the refrigerator, in cold water, or in the microwave. Do not thaw on the counter. Refrigerators should be 40°F or cooler and freezers should be 0°F or cooler.
- Washing fruit and vegetables before eating.
- Washing hands after touching animals, animal feces or animal environments such as barns or pens.
- Keeping sick children home from daycare and preschool.
- Being careful when swimming. Do not swallow the water. People with diarrhea should avoid sharing baths with other and swimming in pools or lakes until 2 weeks after diarrhea ends.
- People with diarrhea should not prepare food for others.

In order to lower the risk of getting HUS, your doctor may not give you antibiotics when you have diarrhea.

Where can I get more information?

For more information contact your healthcare provider or local health center. You can also contact the Maine Center for Disease Control and Prevention by calling 1-800-821-5821 or visiting www.maine.gov/idepi. The federal Centers for Disease Control and Prevention website – <http://www.cdc.gov/ecoli> - is another excellent source of information.