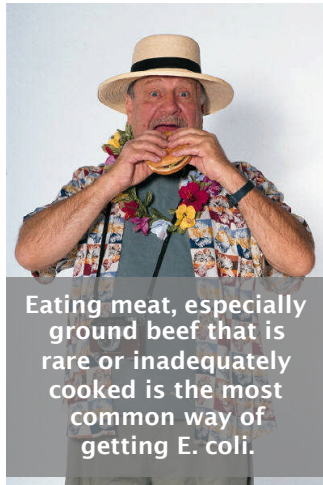


E. coli 0157:H7

Why is E. coli 0157:H7 important?



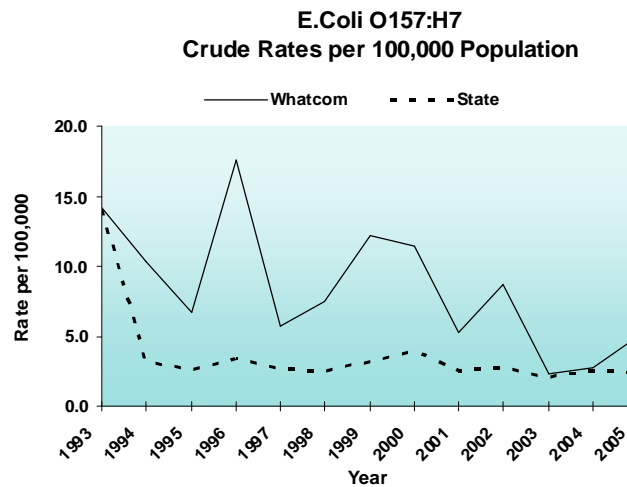
E. coli 0157:H7 is a bacteria that normally lives in the intestines of humans and animals. Many strains of these bacteria are harmless, but one particular strain known as E. coli 0157:H7 (referred to in this report as E. coli) is known to produce a toxin that can cause serious illness.

Eating ground beef that is inadequately cooked is the most common way of getting E. coli. In Whatcom County, sources of exposure include: consumption of raw milk or raw milk cheese, and direct contact with farm animals. Symptoms of E. coli include bloody diarrhea and abdominal pain, sometimes accompanied by a fever. Other more serious complications can result from E. coli infections. Children under the age of five years and the elderly are at highest risk for developing hemolytic uremic syndrome (HUS).

How are we doing?

Washington State has had a higher incidence of E. coli compared to the national rate. In 2004, the incidence rate in Washington State was 2.5 cases per 100,000 population, about twice the rate for the United States. The following chart and table provide crude incidence rates per 100,000 population for Whatcom County and Washington State from 1993 (when E. coli became a reportable disease) through 2005. The table, on the next page, also provides the number of cases 1993-2005.

Note:
These comparisons may be influenced by variations in diagnosis and reporting by health care providers. Thus, if reporting in Whatcom County is more frequent than in other local health jurisdictions, reported rates will be higher.



The number of E. coli cases in Whatcom County has varied over the years, but rates are frequently higher than Washington State. One possible explanation for these differences could be the prominence of the farming economy in Whatcom County.

What remains to be done?

Whatcom County Public Health provides food service inspections and public education on proper food preparation and cooking, as well as appropriate hand-washing techniques. Public Health also investigates each reported case to determine possible origin and to prevent further spread of the disease. Statistical analysis of the potential risk factors identified during the investigation of each case is done. Risk factors are then ranked in order of frequency to determine the cause of the infection. Public Health will continue to educate the public on risks and prevention activities. We will continue our work with other local and State agencies to reduce the occurrence of the disease or associated complications.

E. coli 0157:H7 Crude Rates & Cases per 100,000 Population

Year	Whatcom County		Washington State	
	Rates per 100,000 Population	# of Cases	Rates per 100,000 Population	# of Cases
1993	14.2	20	14.1	740
1994	10.3	15	3.2	174
1995	6.7	10	2.6	140
1996	17.6	27	3.4	187
1997	5.7	9	2.6	149
1998	7.5	12	2.5	143
1999	12.2	20	3.2	186
2000	11.4	19	4.0	236
2001	5.3	9	2.5	150
2002	8.7	15	2.7	166
2003	2.3	4	2.1	128
2004	2.8	5	2.5	153
2005	5.0	9	2.4	149

