



Tom Barrett
Mayor

Bevan K. Baker, FACHE
Commissioner of Health

Health Department Administration

Frank P. Zeidler Municipal Building, 841 North Broadway, 3rd Floor, Milwaukee, WI 53202-3653 phone (414) 286-3521 fax (414) 286-5990
web site: www.milwaukee.gov/health

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Media Contact: Raquel Filmanowicz
414-286-3175 (Office)
414-397-1614 (Cell)

City of Milwaukee Health Department Investigates E. coli Case Linked to European Outbreak

The City of Milwaukee Health Department (MHD) has recently received a report of a case of a persons with E. coli O104:H4 infection that is linked to the European outbreak impacting Germany and other European countries. In particular, Germany is currently seeing an outbreak of disease related to this rare strain of e. coli bacteria. As of June 2nd, according to data available from the World Health Organization, more than 1,800 cases of illness and 18 deaths have been linked to this outbreak, with most cases originating from Germany.

The City of Milwaukee Health Department has been collaborating with the Wisconsin Division of Public Health and the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention in the investigation of a probable case of e. coli O104:H4 infection in a person who recently traveled from Germany.

The source of the current outbreak in Germany is believed to be a contaminated food product which has yet to be identified. CDC has stated that they have no information indicating shipment of any suspected food products to the US. Transmission of e. coli from person to person is possible and occurs rarely. Assuring adequate hand washing is effective in preventing spread from one person to another.

The case is an adult who has been diagnosed with Hemolytic Uremic Syndrome (HUS) and is hospitalized. This is one of three cases that the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention has referred to in its previous press releases. HUS is a serious complication of e.coli infection.

Based on our epidemiologic investigation we are confident that the infection was not contracted in Milwaukee. We have not identified any subsequent cases linked to this case, and we continue to monitor the situation closely. We have enhanced our surveillance, including monitoring emergency room visit for diarrheal illness, and have not identified anything that would indicate any increase in diarrheal disease locally. Again, no locally acquired cases have been identified.

It can take between 2 to 10 days after being exposed to develop symptoms. Typical symptoms of infection with this type of e coli include diarrhea (often accompanied with blood) and abdominal cramps. Fever and vomiting may also be present. Most patients recover within 5-7 days, but some people go on to develop HUS about a week after the start of diarrhea.

Healthcare providers who suspect e coli infection in persons who have recently traveled should report those cases to their local health department immediately, in the City of Milwaukee, suspected cases can be reported to 286-3624 during business hours and after hours to 286-2150. Healthcare providers who suspect e. coli should not treat patients with antibiotics until e coli infection has been ruled out through testing, as antibiotics usage with e coli in some studies has been associated with HUS.

MHD strongly encourages health care providers to collect stool specimens from any suspected cases and have those specimens analyzed by either the City of Milwaukee Health Department Laboratory or the Wisconsin State Lab of Hygiene. If you are experiencing symptoms of e coli and have traveled recently to Germany you should contact your healthcare provider and let them know about the outbreak in Germany and the importance of being tested for the infection.

Think Health. Act Now!