



# Steritech®

FOODBORNE ILLNESS EDUCATION SERIES

## SHIGA TOXIN-PRODUCING *E. COLI*

Shiga toxin-producing *E. coli* (STEC) is one of the “Big Six” microorganisms that can cause serious foodborne illness and has been implicated in numerous outbreaks and recalls. Foodservice establishments must be vigilant to keep customers safe.

### ABOUT *E. COLI*

- STEC strains are naturally found in the gastrointestinal tracts of healthy animals and are transmitted from fecal contamination or from person to person through the fecal-oral route.
- STEC may also be found in water, soil, and insects or in food contaminated with fecal material.
- The most often reported strain is O157:H7, but there are other strains that have been identified in foodborne illness.
- *E. coli* can survive and grow slowly at low temperatures and under acidic conditions. These bacteria can survive the acidity of the stomach to pass into the intestines where STEC produce a toxin that damages the lining of the intestines.

### TRANSMISSION, SYMPTOMS & STATISTICS

- *E. coli* infection can be transmitted through food such as fruit, vegetables, dairy products, and raw meats contaminated with fecal material, or by an infected food handler who does not wash their hands after using the toilet and then prepares food that is served without further cooking.
- Approximately 1% of U.S. foodborne illness outbreaks and 3% of deaths from all outbreaks are traced back to STEC.
- Symptoms may include: Watery or bloody diarrhea, fever, severe abdominal cramping, vomiting, and nausea.
- The onset time is anywhere from 12 hours to 48 hours and the duration is 5 to 7 days.
- Anyone is susceptible, but the illness is most severe in young children, the elderly, and immunocompromised individuals.
- In some people, STEC can cause a sometimes fatal kidney disease called Hemolytic Uremic Syndrome (HUS).

### KEEP YOUR OPERATIONS & CUSTOMERS SAFE

- Verify suppliers: are monitoring produce growers for Good Agricultural Practices; are testing meats prior to shipment; have trace-back capabilities; and are in compliance with all federal and local regulations.
- Ensure your locations have programs in place such as HACCP plans and Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs) for produce washing, personal hygiene, prevention of cross-contamination, and sanitation.
- Have an employee wellness policy to exclude those with symptoms such as vomiting and diarrhea, or anyone diagnosed with an illness resulting from *Shigella* spp., *Salmonella* Typhi, non-typhoidal *Salmonella*, STEC, hepatitis A, or norovirus.
- Cook raw meats to proper temperature (see box, right).
- Follow-up on any customer foodborne illness claims without delay, and alert health department of multiple reports so any outbreaks can be investigated quickly.

## 4 MUST-KNOW FACTS FOR LOCATION EMPLOYEES

- 1 Wash your hands between each task and after using the restroom. Use hot, soapy water. Wash for at least 20 seconds.
- 2 Avoid cross-contamination by washing and sanitizing utensils, equipment, and other food contact surfaces when switching between tasks. Wash vegetables and fruits before cutting.
- 3 Cook raw meats/poultry to proper temperatures: Ground beef/ground pork/injected steaks to 155° F; Seafood to 145° F; and Chicken/Turkey to 165° F
- 4 Do not come to work when you are sick. You can spread dangerous germs to food, surfaces, and other people.