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HEALTH DISTRICT INVESTIGATING SHIGA-TOXIN PRODUCING E-COLI CASES

Benton-Franklin Health District is investigating three cases of Shiga-toxin producing E. coli (STEC). No single source has been identified, but two cases are associated with animal handling for exhibition.

In general, cattle are the most common source. Unpasteurized milk, undercooked ground beef, and contaminated raw produce are other known sources. Infection can be prevented by thorough handwashing after contact with farm animals, farm environments, or handling raw meat. Additional recommendations are to thoroughly cook ground beef and venison and wash preparation areas to avoid contaminating other foods and to wash produce thoroughly before eating.

Symptoms include abdominal cramping and severe or bloody diarrhea, but not high fever. Infection usually occurs within 2 – 6 days after exposure. Most persons will recover without treatment, but STEC can have serious complications including hemolytic uremic syndrome (HUS) or thrombotic thrombocytopenic purpura. In fact, treatment with antibiotics may increase the risk of HUS.

Providers are encouraged to test patients who present with compatible symptoms for enteric pathogens, including STEC. Bacteria and Shiga toxin may be difficult to detect after one week of illness, so early testing is recommended.

STEC is a notifiable condition so providers should also report all cases to Benton-Franklin Health District at 509-539-0416 during business hours OR 509-543-3851 after hours.