

Fact Sheet

E. coli

Q: What is *E. coli*?

E. coli is a very common bacterium that lives in the intestines of warm-blooded animals, including humans. Most *E. coli* strains are harmless and often beneficial, but there are a few strains of *E. coli* that are harmful to humans when ingested. The most common of these harmful strains is *E. coli* O157:H7.

Q: Where does *E. coli* O157:H7 come from?

Its source is usually inadequately cooked processed meats, such as hamburger. It is very rare for this organism to cause trouble in drinking water. It usually enters the source water through human or animal waste.

Q. Is *E. coli* in my drinking water?

No. Des Moines Water Works' state-of-the-art laboratory monitors your drinking water at the plant to ensure that no harmful bacteria are present. In addition, Des Moines Water Works collects 150 samples of water per month from Des Moines' distribution system to comply with the United States Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) regulations. An employee travels to various taps throughout the area and collects samples to determine chlorine levels and collects samples for bacteria analysis. The surrounding suburbs and cities that use Des Moines Water Works water also collect samples from their systems for testing. This means that over 300 samples per month are collected to ensure that you are receiving safe, clean drinking water. *E. coli* has never been found in Des Moines Water Works' drinking water.

Q: How does Des Moines Water Works remove *E. coli* from the source water?

Des Moines Water Works uses several steps to remove *E. coli* from the water. Lime softening, sand filtration, and chlorination are used in combination to effectively treat our water, ensuring that you receive the highest quality, safe drinking water.

Q: What are the health effects of *E. coli* O157:H7?

E. coli O157:H7 grows inside the human intestines causing diarrhea and vomiting. In some individuals, the toxin that it produces may be absorbed by the blood stream. This toxin then travels to the kidneys where it causes life-threatening damage.

For more information, call the SAFE DRINKING WATER HOTLINE: 1-800-426-4791.