

Fact sheet

Hemolytic uremic syndrome (HUS)

What is hemolytic uremic syndrome (HUS)?

Hemolytic uremic syndrome (HUS) is a rare but serious disease that affects the kidneys and blood clotting function, usually after a diarrheal infection. It is characterized by anemia, kidney failure, and a low blood platelet count. Children younger than age 5, the elderly, and those with compromised immune systems are more likely to develop HUS. About 10 people in Utah are reported to get HUS each year.

What causes HUS?

HUS is usually caused by a diarrheal infection with Shiga toxin-producing *E. coli* (STEC). About 5-10% of people diagnosed with STEC develop HUS. It is not clear why some people infected with Shiga toxin-producing *E. coli* (STEC) develop HUS, while others do not.

What are the signs and symptoms of HUS?

Individuals usually develop HUS within 3 weeks after their diarrheal infection begins. Paleness, feeling very tired, and not being able to pee normally are all common symptoms.

What type of health problems are caused by HUS?

Although most people with HUS recover completely, a small number have long-term health complications from damage to the kidney, pancreas, or brain, and some die.

How is HUS diagnosed?

HUS is diagnosed through blood work, stool testing to identify the diarrheal infection, and sometimes urine testing.

How is HUS treated?

The only treatment for patients with HUS is supportive care, which often requires a prolonged hospital stay. There is no known treatment or therapy to stop or modify the progression of HUS. In severe cases, dialysis (filtering an individual's blood) or blood transfusions may be needed.

Antibiotics are generally not helpful for STEC infections and may increase risk of developing HUS.

How can STEC infections and the potential complications of HUS be prevented?

STEC infections cause diarrheal illness and can lead to HUS. To prevent STEC infection, take these steps:

- Always wash your hands thoroughly with soap and water before you eat or prepare food, after you use the toilet, after you change a diaper, and after you touch pets or animals.
- Avoid eating raw or undercooked beef.
- Avoid drinking unpasteurized (raw) milk or unpasteurized milk products.
- Avoid drinking unpasteurized fruit juices (e.g., apple juice or apple cider).

- Keep ready to eat foods from becoming contaminated by raw meat.
- Wash fruits and vegetables thoroughly, especially those that will not be cooked.

Where can I get more information?

- Your personal healthcare provider
- Your [local health department](#)
- [Utah Department of Health and Human Services](#)
- [Centers for Disease Control and Prevention](#)

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