FACT SHEET: *E. coli* O157:H7

What is *E. coli* O157:H7?	*E. coli* O157:H7 is one of hundreds of strains of the bacterium *Escherichia coli*. Although most strains of this bacterium are harmless and live in the intestines of healthy humans and animals, this particular strain produces a powerful toxin and can cause illness. The combination of letters and numbers in the name of the bacterium refers to specific genetic markers found on its surface, which distinguishes it from other types of *E. coli*. Eating food that has not been cooked sufficiently to kill bacteria such as *E. coli* O157:H7 can cause severe illness in humans.
Number of Illnesses Attributed to *E. Coli* O157:H7 Remains Low	Overall, the level of illnesses related to *E. coli* O157:H7 is on a downward trend. • Each year, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) tracks foodborne illnesses. In 2005, CDC reported that only 1.06 foodborne illnesses out of every 100,000 cases were associated with *E. coli* O157:H7. • Recent figures indicate that the United States is on track to reach the government's Healthy People 2010 goal for *E. coli* O157:H7. Overall, the incidence of *E. coli* O157:H7 cases declined 29 percent since the baseline of 1996-1998. • In addition to the decline of these foodborne illnesses, ground beef samples testing positive for *E. coli* O157:H7 have declined more than 80 percent between 2000 and 2004.
Commitment to Safety Research	Years ago, America's beef producers set out to reduce and eliminate *E. coli* O157:H7 and today remain committed to that goal. • The beef industry has invested approximately $400 million on beef safety research in the past decade in addition to spending $250 million in processing plant improvements and interventions. • Beef producers have invested more than $22 million in checkoff-funded beef safety research and development of methods aimed at reducing foodborne bacteria since 1993. Today, because of the research and cooperative efforts with all partners in the beef supply chain, interventions to reduce and eliminate *E. coli* O157:H7 are in place on farms, in feedlots and in packing plants across the country.
Making Progress Using Best Practices	Individuals representing each segment of the production chain meet yearly to review and update the Beef Industry Food Safety Council (BIFSCo) Best Practices, which serve as a roadmap in reducing *E. coli* O157:H7. • Individuals and companies involved in this process recognize that safety is a non-competitive issue. • These Best Practices are ever-changing documents that are updated and reviewed as scientific and technological advances are made. These resources are available free of charge at www.bifsco.org.
Tips for Preventing Foodborne Illnesses	Consumers can take important steps in the kitchen to ensure their food is safe: • Always wash hands, cutting boards, utensils and countertops with hot, soapy water before and after handling meat. • Don't cross-contaminate — separate raw meat and poultry from other foods and don't place cooked food on a plate that previously contained raw meat or poultry. • Refrigerate leftovers in shallow containers promptly after eating. • Use an instant-read meat thermometer to ensure the proper internal temperature and eliminate any harmful bacteria.
	Recommended Cooking Temperatures Poultry 165°F Ground Beef 160°F Beef Roasts and Steaks 145°F Seafood 145°F
Food Safety Questions	**USDA Meat and Poultry Hotline:** For food safety answers on topics including safe storage and handling of food, safe preparation, product dating, product content and more. The hotline is open from 10:00 a.m. to 4:00 p.m. Eastern time on weekdays year round. **Call toll-free:** 888-MPHotline (888-674-6854) **Email:** mphotline.fsis@usda.gov **Online:** http://www.fsis.usda.gov/Home/index.asp

For more info, visit www.BeefFromPastureToPlate.org
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