
EHEC Outbreak: Rare Strain of E. Coli Unknown in Previous Outbreaks

The strain of enterohaemorrhagic Escherichia coli (EHEC) 0104:H4 isolated from cases in the EHEC infection outbreak in Germany is a rare one, seen in humans before, but never in an EHEC outbreak. This has been confirmed by the World Health Organization (WHO) Collaborating Centre for Reference and Research on Escherichia and Klebsiella, the Statens Serum Institut in Denmark.

The molecular/genetic features of this pathogen are important in helping authorities to identify cases in other countries that could be associated with the outbreak in Germany and to identify the source of the outbreak. While epidemiological and laboratory investigations continue, the source of the outbreak still remains unknown. WHO is not making any new recommendations for treatment. The normal hygiene measures should be observed, hand washing after toilet use and before touching food. Anyone who has developed bloody diarrhea and abdominal pain, and who has had contact recently with northern Germany, should seek medical advice urgently.

EHEC outbreak: Increase in cases in Germany Cases of haemolytic uraemic syndrome (HUS) and enterohemorrhagic E. coli (EHEC) continue to rise in Germany. Ten countries have now reported cases to WHO/Europe.

As of May 31, 2011, nine patients in Germany have died of HUS, and six of EHEC. One person in Sweden has also died. There are many hospitalised patients, several of them requiring intensive care, including dialysis. The number of patients in Germany presenting with HUS and bloody diarrhea caused by STEC is 470, which is 97 more than the day before, and 1064 of EHEC, which is an increase of 268. Overall in Europe, 499 cases of HUS and 1115 cases of EHEC have been reported, 1614 in total.

Cases have now also been notified from: Austria (HUS 0, EHEC 2), Denmark (7, 7), France, (0, 6), Netherlands (4, 4), Norway, (0, 1), Spain, (1, 0), Sweden (15, 28) and Switzerland (0, 2) and the United Kingdom. (2, 1) All these cases except two are in people who had recently visited northern Germany or in one case, had contact with a visitor from northern Germany.

The above story is reprinted (with editorial adaptations by ScienceDaily staff) from materials provided by World Health Organization.

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Published on : Mon, 6 Jun 2011