

Avoiding ill health at camp

Guidance to stop the spread of E. coli O157 and viral gastro-enteritis infection at Scout camp



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Background information:

- The farmer or landowner will not be aware of animals excreting E.coli O157 because the animals show no symptoms and there is no way of knowing when animals are infected.
- The animals do not become ill but can spread the organism to people by direct contact and indirectly via droppings and manure spread on land.
- Animal droppings on pasture are the greatest problem, especially where there are concentrations of animals in a given area, and in wet conditions. You will find it almost impossible to avoid getting animal droppings on your boots or shoes in these circumstances. Such footwear can spread droppings into buildings, tents, and vehicles. On land affected in this way, fences, gates, stiles, seating and play areas can also become contaminated with animal droppings. The danger is that these droppings may contain E.coli O157.
- **To be a risk, the E.coli O157 has to be swallowed from contact with hands, contaminated food or contaminated water. Even tiny amounts of E.coli O157 can be a severe risk.**
- When conditions are wet, contamination can spread more easily onto hands, footwear, tents etc., with the increased possibility that the organism can pass into the mouth or contaminate food and water.
- Normally such contact with E.coli O157 will be unlikely for most of the population, even those walking and cycling in the country. Those camping, picnicking and playing on farm land used for grazing animals are most at risk. In dry conditions, the risk should be less.
- Surface water run-off from fields containing animal dropping can lead to contamination of streams, burns, etc., particularly during wet conditions.

- You may well be able to see the droppings: you will not see the contamination that they cause.
- The organism is known to survive in soil and animal droppings for weeks, but the levels of contamination generally decline over time.

Recommendations

- Ideally, to completely avoid risk of infection by E.coli O157 from this source, fields used for grazing or stockholding of animals should not be used for camping, picnicking and play areas.
- However, as with everyday life, these risks can be greatly reduced by adopting the following sensible precautions:
 - ✓ Always wash hands before eating, drinking and smoking i.e., use soap, clean towels and preferably hot and running water.
 - ✓ Keep farm animals off the fields to be used for the preceding three weeks.
 - ✓ Keep farm animals off fields during use.
 - ✓ Remove all visible droppings, ideally at the beginning of the 3 week period.
 - ✓ Mow the grass, keep it short and remove the clippings before the fields are used for recreation.
 - ✓ Ensure that water from burns and streams is treated before drinking.

These precautions, taken together, will greatly reduce the risk of E.coli O157 and other infections from this source, and allow your camping and outdoor activities to continue in greater safety.

If you need clarification of any of the above points call the National Safety in Scouting Co-ordinator at Gilwell Park or e mail stuart.carter@scout.org.uk

The Scout Association

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