



## Loudoun County, Virginia

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## NEWS RELEASE

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### Several E. Coli Cases Associated with Petting Goats at a Loudoun Farm

The Loudoun County Health Department is notifying the public of the exposure to a specific type of bacterium, called *Shiga Toxin Producing E. coli (STEC)*, by several people who came in contact with goats at Georges Mill Farm in Lovettsville between March 6 and April 20, 2022. Several individuals experienced diarrhea and other symptoms of illness. The bacterium was isolated and identified by the Virginia Division of Consolidated Laboratory Services.

Coming into direct contact with animals, particularly livestock, presents a risk for illnesses. People should remember that, while animal interactions can be fun and educational, it's always important to practice healthy habits around pets and other animals, such as washing your hands after being in contact with animals. The Loudoun County Health Department is communicating directly with those who are known to have come in contact with goats at Georges Mill Farm. Anyone who had contact with these goats during this time frame and has not yet communicated with the Health Department should:

- Monitor for illness and seek medical attention if you become ill. Let your healthcare provider know of your possible exposure to assist in your diagnosis and treatment.
- Report your exposure to the Loudoun County Health Department by completing this [short survey](#).

The staff at the farm have assisted the Health Department in identifying who may be at risk of illness and by helping to prevent future infections. There is no evidence of ongoing risk to visitors at Georges Mill Farm.

### E. Coli Symptoms

Symptoms of *E. coli* illness usually start two to four days after exposure, but can occur as late as 12 hours later, or as long as 10 days after exposure. Symptoms of *STEC* may include:

- Diarrhea with stomach cramps
- Blood may also be present in the stool
- Vomiting
- Fever
- Chills

In a very small percentage of cases (approximately 2% to 7%) particularly higher risk groups such as children under the age of 5, the immunocompromised, and the elderly, a more severe complication known as HUS (Hemolytic Uremic Syndrome) may occur. That complication includes kidney failure and anemia, and often results in prolonged hospitalization. However, the large majority of people exposed to *STEC* do not develop HUS and recover completely from their

diarrhea within 5 to 10 days. More specific information on E. coli, including STEC, is available from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention [here](#).

## Prevention

Health officials remind everyone that there are steps they can take to help prevent contracting illnesses from animals, which sometimes carry germs that can make people sick. Animals that look clean and healthy can carry harmful germs, and even areas where animals live, or roam can contain germs that can make people sick. Having contact with the animals' environment can also be a risk factor for illness. Every year, many people get sick after visiting animal exhibits, such as petting zoos, aquariums, farms, or fairs. Preventive steps to take include:

- Wash your hands right after touching animals or anything in the areas where they live, roam or eat. Even if you didn't touch the animals or wore gloves, wash your hands when you leave animal areas.
- Running water and soap are best, but if they are not available, use an alcohol-based hand sanitizer that contains at least 60% alcohol and wash your hands with soap and running water as soon as you can.
- Don't eat or drink around animals and keep food and drinks away from animal areas.

Children 5 years of age and younger, people with weakened immune systems and adults over 65 years of age are more likely to get sick from the germs animals can carry and should take extra precautions at animal exhibits.

Take these extra precautions for children:

- Always supervise children around animals.
- Leave items such as strollers, pacifiers, cups, or toys outside the exhibit.
- Don't let children put their thumbs, fingers, or objects such as pacifiers in their mouths when they're around animals or in an animal area.
- Don't let children sit or play on the ground in animal areas.
- Teach children to approach animals with caution and follow the rules provided on signs or verbally by the staff.
- Children 5 years of age and younger should not have contact with reptiles, amphibians, or live poultry because these animals are more likely to make them sick. Parents of children in this age group should also consider not letting the children have direct contact with other types of livestock.

For more information on how to stay healthy at animal exhibits, visit the [Centers for Disease Control and Prevention](#).