

Update (June 7, 2015): DHEC confirms 7 STEC cases in Greenwood County; daycare closes voluntarily

Laboratory testing conducted by the S.C. Department of Health and Environmental Control (DHEC) today confirmed seven (7) cases of Shiga toxin-producing *E. coli* (STEC) associated with a daycare facility in Greenwood County. At this time, lab cultures have confirmed that four (4) of these cases have infections that have the same bacteria strain.

As a result of today's laboratory confirmation and in order to help limit the possibility of further spread of the infection, DHEC issued a public health consent agreement with The Learning Vine (101 Overland Drive, Greenwood, SC 29646) to close. The daycare facility has closed voluntarily and has been cooperative. No information suggests a risk to the broader community at this time.

"Our primary concern is protecting the health and safety of the community," said State Epidemiologist Dr. Linda Bell. "We continue to work closely with the daycare facility and community partners to identify the source of the contamination and stop the spread of the infection."

"While we understand the public interest in this evolving investigation, we also remain committed to respecting the privacy of the patients and families affected by this illness," said Bell. "At this time, there is no evidence of ongoing transmission of the infection within the facility. However, due to the possibility of bacterial shedding from individuals who do not have symptoms and out of an abundance of caution, DHEC and The Learning Vine have agreed to close the facility to reduce the risk of potential infection until all daycare staff and attendees are tested."

As part of this ongoing investigation, DHEC has taken the following steps to identify the source of the contamination and stop the spread of the infection:

- Completed an initial onsite inspection of the daycare facility and provided cleaning guidance
- Conducted over 50 interviews to identify and notify individuals at possible risk for exposure
- Collected and tested samples for laboratory analysis
- Established a hotline and held a forum to provide assistance to those affected
- Confirmed the daycare facility had completed the required cleaning by conducting a follow-up inspection with the S.C. Department of Social Services
- Issued a public health consent agreement with the daycare facility in order to limit the possibility of further spread of the infection

STEC is one of hundreds of strains of the bacterium *Escherichia coli*. Although most strains are harmless and live in the intestines of healthy humans and animals, this strain produces a strong toxin and can cause severe illness. Currently, two cases are hospitalized.

Symptoms of STEC infections typically include severe stomach cramps, diarrhea (often bloody), and vomiting. Most people get better within five to seven days. However, children under 5 years, seniors, pregnant women, and people with a chronic health condition or a weak immune system are more prone to serious complications from *E. coli* infections.

The best way to avoid STEC and other *E. coli* infections is to wash your hands often using soap and warm water after using the bathroom, before eating and when changing diapers. Also, do not send children to daycare or school if they are sick, and keep them at home until diarrhea has ended and the child has been cleared by a medical professional.

For more information about STEC and how to prevent it, visit:
<http://www.cdc.gov/ecoli/general/index.html>.

**Note to reporters and editors: Information resulting from this investigation will be provided as it is confirmed, and in accordance with state and federal law. Due to federal privacy restrictions, DHEC is unable to provide additional information concerning any individual, including details about physical condition, hospitalization, age, sex, and residence.*

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