

LETTERS

BLOOD STAINED NAPPY

***Escherichia coli* O157 causes blood stained nappies**Michael A Crilly *senior lecturer in clinical epidemiology*

Polwarth Building, Aberdeen University Medical School, Aberdeen AB25 2ZD, UK

The clinical importance of also considering *Escherichia coli* O157 is not mentioned in the 10-minute consultation on the primary care management of a child with a “blood stained nappy and frequent loose stools.”¹ This, even though infection occurs more commonly in children than adults and is associated with bloody diarrhoea (indicative of haemorrhagic colitis) in 90% of all laboratory confirmed cases.^{2,3} *E coli* O157 is the leading cause of the haemolytic uraemic syndrome among children in the UK and 15% of children with *E coli* O157 related diarrhoea will develop it.³

Incidence of infection varies across the UK; higher in northern England and Scotland.² The dose required to cause illness is very low and the organism is widespread among the faeces of otherwise healthy animals such as cows, sheep, and deer. Consequently, clusters of cases and larger outbreaks are features of infection. Scrupulous hand hygiene and early contact with the local health protection team are important.

E coli O157 should be excluded in any child with a blood stained nappy and frequent loose stools and such children require careful monitoring for the haemolytic uraemic syndrome.³ Primary care physicians should avoid prescribing antibiotics at the initial presentation of bloody diarrhoea in a child as this increases the risk of developing the syndrome.⁴

Competing interests: None declared.

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- 4 Wong CS, Jelacic S, Habeeb RL, Watkins SL, Tarr PI. The risk of the hemolytic-uremic syndrome after antibiotic treatment of *Escherichia coli* O157:H7 infections. *N Engl J Med* 2000;342:1930-6.

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