# Sharp rise in harmful E.coli infections and potential cancer link uncovered in the UK



A recent study has revealed a significant increase in the number of people diagnosed with a harmful strain of Escherichia coli (E.coli) in the United Kingdom over the past several years. Data from the UK Health Security Agency (UKHSA) indicates that in 2023, 2,341 individuals were infected with shiga toxin-producing E.coli (STEC), marking a nearly tenfold rise from the 297 cases recorded in 2016.

Outbreaks of this bacterial infection are frequently associated with contaminated food, with particular emphasis on salad leaves found in pre-packaged sandwiches and wraps, as well as undercooked meats. E.coli is a known cause of food poisoning and can provoke severe symptoms including stomach cramps, vomiting, and fever. While many cases are managed through hydration and rest, some patients require hospital treatment due to the severity of their condition.

According to a report published in the Journal of Medical Microbiology, researchers have attributed the surge in infections partly to more extensive testing but also highlight that there is a genuine increase in the clinical and public health burden caused by this E.coli strain.

In a related development, scientists have identified a bacterial toxin produced by a different strain of E.coli that may be linked to rising rates of bowel cancer among young people worldwide. This toxin, known as colibactin, has the ability to alter DNA and is produced by a strain of E.coli distinct from the one commonly causing diarrhoea and food poisoning. Recent studies suggest that England is experiencing a sharper increase in bowel cancer incidence among younger populations compared to many other countries.

These findings highlight the complexity of E.coli infections and their impacts on public health, underlining the importance of ongoing research and monitoring of food safety practices in preventing bacterial outbreaks.

Source: [Noah Wire Services](https://www.noahwire.com)

## Bibliography

1. <https://www.foodsafetynews.com/2025/04/researchers-describe-spike-in-english-e-coli-infections/> - Corroborates the nearly tenfold increase in non-O157 STEC infections from 2016 to 2023, with a focus on the role of increased PCR testing and diverse serotypes.
2. <https://www.gbnews.com/health/cancer-bacteria-health-warning-uk> - Supports the rise in non-O157 STEC cases and highlights potential links between E. coli and colon cancer, especially in younger individuals.
3. <https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/39791999/> - Details the epidemiology of non-O157 STEC, confirming the significant increase in cases over recent years, which aligns with other reports.
4. <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/shiga-toxin-producing-escherichia-coli-o157-annual-totals/shiga-toxin-producing-escherichia-coli-stec-data-2021> - Provides STEC data for 2021, including a breakdown of STEC O157 and non-O157 cases, which contributes to understanding trends in E. coli infections.
5. <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/shiga-toxin-producing-escherichia-coli-o157-outbreak-september-to-october-2022/outbreak-report-investigation-into-a-uk-wide-outbreak-of-shiga-toxin-producing-e-coli-o157-september-to-october-2022> - Mentions the observed increase in STEC activity across the UK, highlighting the broader context of E. coli outbreaks beyond just England.
6. <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC7298878/> - Discusses the mechanisms of E. coli strains, including potential carcinogenic effects, supporting the exploration of links between certain E. coli toxins and cancer.
7. <https://www.express.co.uk/news/uk/2046372/ecoli-food-poisoning-infection-ukhsa> - Please view link - unable to able to access data