INFORMATION SHEET 2 – E. COLI 0157

WHAT IS IT?
Escherichia coli 0157 is a type of bacteria that produce a toxin harmful to humans.

WHERE IS IT FOUND?
E. coli 0157 is naturally found in the gut of farm animals such as cattle, sheep and goats. It can survive in the environment for long periods of time.

HOW IS IT SPREAD?
E. coli 0157 is spread from direct contact with animals and their faeces, particularly on farms. It is also spread by eating contaminated foods, for example undercooked beef burgers or unwashed vegetables. Being in contact with only a few bacteria can lead to infection.

WHAT DOES IT DO?
E. coli 0157 causes diarrhoea with blood in the stools, headaches, nausea and vomiting, typically within 3 to 4 days of infection, although this period may be shorter or longer.
For those who are very young, very old or already unwell there may be more severe complications which can in some cases result in kidney failure and death.

HOW IS IT CONTROLLED?
The only way to eliminate the risk entirely is for children to avoid contact with animals or their faeces. It is the parent or carer's choice whether their child is allowed to touch or feed the animals. Farmers practising good hygiene and removing faeces from public areas helps manage the risk. It is important that there is supervised washing of children's hands immediately after leaving an animal contact area, before eating or drinking on the farm and after removing footwear.

HOW SHOULD WE WASH HANDS?
Simply rinsing the tips of fingertips under cold water does NOT count. Here are some reminders:
- **Always use warm water. It's better to wet hands before applying soap as this prevents irritation.**
- **Rub hands together vigorously for about 15 seconds, making sure both sides of the hands are washed thoroughly, around the thumbs, between each finger and around and under the nails.**
- **Then, rinse with clean water.**
- **Germs spread more easily if hands are wet so dry them thoroughly. Use a clean dry towel, paper towel or air dryer; it doesn't matter which.**