

MANAGING YOUR HEMOLYTIC-UREMIC SYNDROME

What Is Hemolytic-uremic Syndrome?

Hemolytic-uremic syndrome (HUS) is a serious condition that may occur following severe bloody infectious diarrhea or a severe intestinal disorder for several days. HUS affects the blood clotting system, especially tiny blood vessels (capillaries) in and around the kidneys. Clots form in these vessels, so fewer blood cells are available for other clotting. As a result, internal bleeding may occur, especially in the kidneys. HUS is most common in children younger than 4 years old. It's the most common cause of kidney failure in children. In kidney failure, the kidneys stop working, so kidney dialysis may be needed for several weeks or longer.

What Causes HUS?

The usual cause is a type of bacteria called VTEC (verocytotoxin-producing *Escherichia coli*). Sometimes other bacteria cause it. Some people getting certain medical treatments or drugs can also have HUS. HUS at times follows a viral infection such as an upper respiratory tract infection. Unpasteurized milk and undercooked meat may also contain bacteria that cause HUS.

What Are the Symptoms of HUS

Symptoms include fever, nausea, vomiting, pain in the abdomen (belly), and high blood pressure. Less frequent or absent urination or reddish urine may occur.

Other symptoms are swelling of the hands, face, or body; pale or yellowish skin color (jaundice); small spots of bleeding under the skin (petechiae); and bruising. Stroke and seizures can also occur.

How Is HUS Diagnosed?

The health care provider makes a diagnosis from a careful examination and medical history. Blood and urine samples, and maybe stool, are tested. The health care provider may order ultrasonography to check for kidney damage. This painless test uses sound waves to look at organs. Other kidney tests may be done.

How Is HUS Treated?

Treatment takes place in the hospital. Intravenous fluids and medicines are given to control blood pressure, correct the body's salt and water balance, and keep the urine flow steady and prevent more kidney damage. Most children and adults recover after hospital treatment. People usually improve in 1 to 2 weeks. Most children recover completely. During treatment, some people need medicine to prevent seizures or treat complications involving the heart. Rarely, people may need kidney dialysis. In dialysis, the blood passes through small tubes in a machine that filters out harmful substances. Kidneys usually start to work normally after a few weeks of dialysis. About 20% to 30% of adults develop chronic renal failure. Adults are more likely than children to get HUS again.

DOs and DON'Ts in Managing HUS

- ✓ **DO** pay attention to changes in urinary habits that could mean kidney disease.
- ✓ **DO** wash your hands thoroughly after contact with livestock and their food products.
- ✓ **DO** call your health care provider if you or your child has had any of the following:
severe bloody diarrhea, high temperature, nausea, vomiting, inability to urinate or less frequent urination than normal, bloody or reddish urine, seizures, or extreme weakness and tiredness.

⊗ **DON'T** eat undercooked meat, especially ground beef. Meat should be cooked to an internal temperature of 155° F or higher.

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FOR MORE INFORMATION

Contact the following sources:

- American Society of Pediatric Nephrology: Tel: (312) 503-4000; Website:
<http://www.aspneph.com>
- National Kidney Foundation: Tel: (1-800) 622-9010 or (212) 889-2210; Website:
<http://www.kidney.org>

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