Preventing Secondary E. coli 0157 Infection

· “Our thoughts and condolences are with all the families who have lost a loved one as a result of the E. coli outbreak, and with all those families both locally and across the province who are dealing with cases of infection,” says Grey Bruce Medical Officer of Health Dr. Murray McQuigge.

· “At this time, the number one priority for public health is to prevent any additional cases of E. coli infection in the Walkerton outbreak.” Public Health Unit efforts are directed to ensuring that person-to-person transmission of the bacteria is prevented, and that residents have the information about the means of transmission to protect themselves and their families. To date, five people have died, and 22 people are hospitalized as a result of the outbreak. Cases have also been identified amongst visitors to Walkerton who reside in other areas of the province.

· The Boil Water Advisory is still in effect. Residents of Walkerton should continue to boil their water for 5 minutes or use bottled water for drinking. Handwashing with soap, using a dilute solution of 1.5 ounces of liquid household bleach in 10 gallons of water for rinsing your hands, is an effective way to prevent hand-to-mouth transmission. Commercial handwashes, such as those you might find at a pharmacy, are not a substitute for handwashing.

· Persons who are suffering from diarrhea should avoid preparing food for other family members, or should ensure that they wash their hands thoroughly after going to the bathroom, and before preparing any food. “E. coli survives in water and ice, so it is a good idea to throw out any ice cubes, juices or other food products that may have been made with contaminated water,” said Dr. McQuigge. He added: “E. coli does not survive in the air, on surfaces like tables or counters and is not spread by coughing, kissing or sexual intercourse.”

· Walkerton residents are cautioned against turning up water heaters in response to concerns about E. coli in the water. This could lead to scalding or serious burns - especially in children. Keep water heater settings at, or below, 49 C (120 F) to be sure that hot water pipes and tap water are kept at safe temperatures.

· In order to ensure adequate management of the outbreak, public health staff will be on duty throughout the weekend. Both the Walkerton and Owen Sound offices of the Health Unit will be
staffed Saturday and Sunday from 9 to 2 to deal with any urgent issues. Additional staff will be called in if necessary.

· Further information can be located at the Grey Bruce Health Unit website: http://www.publichealthgreybruce.on.ca