MDH

(http://www.health.state.mn.us/index.html)

Minnesota Department of Health

News Release

August 12, 2014

Contact information

Health officials link *E. coli* O157 infections to traveling petting zoo

Thirteen cases confirmed so far; Olmsted County Fair was most recent venue

The Minnesota Department of Health (MDH) has identified at least 13 people who have developed *E. coli* O157:H7 infections as part of an outbreak associated with Zerebko Zoo Tran traveling petting zoo. All of these cases have infections with *E. coli* O157:H7 bacteria that have the same DNA fingerprint. Two of these are secondary cases resulting from being exposed to one of the primary cases associated with the petting zoo.

The 13 cases range in age from 2 to 68 years, 10 (77 percent) are female, and they are residents of multiple counties. Seven (54 percent) cases have been hospitalized, including three children. Two of the cases developed a serious complication known as hemolytic uremic syndrome (HUS), which affects kidney function. Currently, one case is hospitalized with HUS.

The petting zoo exhibited at the events listed below between July 4 and July 27, and there have been cases associated with each one:

- Nashwauk 4th of July Festival (7/3-7/5): 1 case
- Polk County Fair (7/9-7/13): 1 case
- Rice County Fair (7/15-7/20): 7 cases (including the 2 secondary cases)
- Olmsted County Fair (7/21-7/27): 3 cases

MDH is currently following up with one case regarding their potential animal exposures prior to their illness. Additional cases associated with attending the Olmsted County Fair could still be identified, as that was the most recent event where Zerebko Zoo Tran exhibited.

Environmental and animal fecal samples collected from Zerebko Zoo Tran yielded the outbreak strain of *E. coli* O157:H7. The owner has been cooperating in the investigation and voluntarily withheld his animals from the last two county fairs at which he was scheduled to exhibit in August.

E. coli O157:H7 is commonly found in ruminant animals such as cattle, goats, and sheep. Outbreaks associated with these animals are documented virtually every year in Minnesota. Therefore, people who contact ruminants at any venue, public or private, are at risk for infection with *E. coli* O157:H7 as well as a variety of other germs. People typically become ill by getting bacteria on their hands after touching the animals or contaminated surfaces, and then swallowing the germs while eating, drinking or during other hand-to-mouth activities. Contamination can be present on the fur or in the saliva of animals, in the soil where these animals are kept, or on surfaces such as fence railings of animal pens.

"These illnesses are a stark reminder that *E. coli* O157:H7 can be present in even the cleanest of animal operations," said MDH State Public Health Veterinarian Dr. Joni Scheftel. Risk associated with animal contact can be reduced through the following measures:

- Visitors to animal exhibits should be made aware that even healthy, well-tended animals can have germs that can make people seriously ill.
- Food, drinks, and items that promote hand-to-mouth contact (for example, pacifiers) should not be brought into animal areas.

- Hands should be washed with soap and water immediately after visiting the animals. Hand sanitizers are not a substitute for soap and running water but may afford some protection until soap and water are available. They do not work well against some germs and when hands are visibly soiled.

Children under 5 years, seniors, pregnant women, and people with a chronic health condition or a weak immune system are prone to serious complications from *E. coli* infections and should take extra care around animals.

Symptoms of illness caused by *E. coli* O157:H7 typically include severe stomach cramps and diarrhea, often with bloody stools, but only a low-grade or no fever. People typically become ill two to five days after exposure, but this time period can range from 1 to at least 8 days. Most people recover in five to 10 days; however, *E. coli* O157:H7 infections sometimes lead to HUS, most commonly in children and the elderly. Diarrhea associated with an *E. coli* O157:H7 infection should NOT be treated with antibiotics, as this practice can promote the development of HUS. More information on *E. coli* O157:H7 can be found at http://www.health.state.mn.us/. (http://www.health.state.mn.us/)

NOTE TO EDITORS: MDH EPIDEMIOLOGISTS CARRIE KLUMB AND JONI SCHEFTEL WILL BE AVAILABLE FOR MEDIA INTERIVEWS AT THE ORVILLE FREEMAN BUIDING, 625 N. Robert Street, St. Paul, today.

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Information on this website is available in alternative formats to individuals with disabilities upon request.