

FDA Investigating Multistate Outbreak of E. coli O157:H7 Infections Likely Linked to Romaine Lettuce from Yuma Growing Region

April 27, 2018

The U.S. Food and Drug Administration, along with the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) and state and local partners, are investigating a multistate outbreak of E. coli O157:H7 illnesses linked to romaine lettuce from the Yuma growing region.

Update

The FDA is continuing to investigate illnesses related to chopped romaine lettuce from the Yuma growing region. We are working to identify multiple distribution channels that can explain the entirety of the nation-wide outbreak and are tracing back from multiple groupings of ill people located in diverse geographic areas.

The FDA has identified one farm as the source of the whole-head romaine lettuce that sickened several people at a correctional facility in Alaska. However, the agency has not determined where in the supply chain the contamination occurred. The agency is examining all possibilities, including that contamination may have occurred at any point along the growing, harvesting, packaging, and distribution chain before reaching the Alaska correctional facility where it was served.

All of the lettuce in question from this farm was harvested during March 5-16 and is past its 21-day shelf life. Because the growing season in the Yuma region is at its end, the farm is not growing any lettuce at this time.

Most of the illnesses in this outbreak are not linked to romaine lettuce from this farm. The agency is investigating dozens of other fields as potential sources of the chopped romaine lettuce and will share information as it becomes available.

To date, the FDA also has no evidence that other types of lettuce, or romaine lettuce grown outside of the Yuma growing region, are involved in this outbreak.

Fast Facts

- The FDA is investigating a multistate outbreak of *E. coli* O157:H7 illnesses likely linked to romaine lettuce sourced from the winter growing areas in and around the Yuma region.
- The [CDC reports](#) that 98 people in 22 states have become ill. These people reported becoming ill in the time period of [March 13, 2018 to April 20, 2018](#). Sixty-four (96%) of 67 people interviewed reported eating romaine lettuce in the week before their illness started.
- The FDA has identified Harrison Farms of Yuma, Arizona, as the grower and sole source of the whole-head romaine lettuce that sickened several people in an Alaska correctional facility, but has not determined where in the supply chain the contamination occurred. The agency is examining all possibilities, including that contamination may have occurred at any point along the growing, harvesting, packaging, and distribution chain before reaching the Alaska correctional facility where it was served.
- All of the lettuce in question from Harrison Farms was harvested during March 5-16 and is past its 21-day shelf life. Because the growing season in the Yuma region is at its end, the farm is not growing any lettuce at this time.
- The remainder of illnesses in this outbreak are not linked to romaine lettuce from Harrison Farms. Most people reported eating a salad at a restaurant, and romaine lettuce was the only common ingredient identified among the salads eaten. The restaurants reported using bagged, chopped romaine lettuce to make salads. Traceback does not indicate that Harrison Farms is the source of the chopped romaine that sickened these people. The FDA is continuing to investigate the source of the chopped romaine lettuce that caused these illnesses and has identified dozens of other fields as possible sources.
- The FDA recommends that consumers ask grocers, restaurants, and other food service establishments where their romaine lettuce originated, and avoid any romaine lettuce, whether chopped, whole head or hearts, that originated from the Yuma growing region. If you cannot confirm the source of the romaine lettuce, do not buy it or eat it. If you have already purchased romaine lettuce or products containing romaine lettuce and cannot confirm the source, throw them away.
- The FDA is continuing to investigate this outbreak and will share more information as it becomes available.
- Consumers who have [symptoms of STEC infection](#) should contact their health care provider to report their symptoms and receive care. Although many infections resolve in 5-7 days, they can result in serious illness, including a potentially serious condition called hemolytic uremic syndrome.
- The current outbreak is not related to a recent multistate outbreak of *E. coli* O157:H7 infections from November to December 2017 linked to [leafy greens](#) consumption. People in the previous outbreak were infected with a different DNA fingerprint of *E. coli* O157:H7 bacteria.

What is the Problem and What is being Done About It?

The FDA and the [CDC](#), along with state and local health officials, are investigating an outbreak of Shiga toxin-producing *E. coli* O157:H7 infections.

There are 98 cases in 22 states: Alaska (8), Arizona (5), California (16), Colorado (2), Connecticut (2), Georgia (1), Idaho (10), Illinois (1), Louisiana (1), Michigan (3), Mississippi (1), Missouri (1), Montana (8), New Jersey (7), New York (2), Ohio (3), Pennsylvania (18), South Dakota (1), Tennessee (1), Virginia (1), Washington (5), and Wisconsin (1). The

current outbreak is not related to a recent multistate outbreak of [E. coli O157:H7 infections linked to leafy greens](#). People in the previous outbreak were infected with a different DNA fingerprint of *E. coli* O157:H7 bacteria.

The most recent information collected by the FDA, in conjunction with federal, state, and local partners, indicates that the romaine lettuce that ill people ate was likely grown or originated from the winter growing areas in or around the Yuma region. This region generally supplies romaine lettuce to the U.S. during November-March each year.

The FDA has identified Harrison Farms as the source of the whole-head romaine lettuce that made several people ill at a correctional facility in Alaska. However, the agency has not determined where in the supply chain the contamination occurred. The FDA is examining all possibilities, including that contamination may have occurred at any point along the growing, harvesting, packaging, and distribution chain before reaching the Alaska correctional facility where it was served.

All of the lettuce in question from Harrison Farms was harvested during March 5-16 and is past its 21-day shelf life. Because the growing season in the Yuma region is at its end, the farm is not growing any lettuce at this time.

The remainder of illnesses in this outbreak are not linked to romaine lettuce from Harrison Farms. The agency is investigating dozens of fields as potential sources of the chopped romaine lettuce and will share additional information as it becomes available.

In a typical traceback effort, CDC and the FDA identify clusters of people who became ill, especially in different geographical regions and work to trace the food eaten by those made ill to a common source. For this outbreak investigation, we have been able to identify romaine lettuce as the common food source, but the available packaging provides very limited information on the source of the products. With limited packaging information, FDA scientists and investigators are working with federal and state partners and companies as quickly as possible to collect, review and analyze hundreds of records in an attempt to traceback the source of the contaminated romaine lettuce. To date, our traceback has revealed that romaine lettuce potentially contaminated with *E. coli* O157:H7 came from the Yuma growing region, but was supplied to restaurants and retailers through multiple processors, grower/shipper companies, and farms.

When we are executing a full traceback investigation, as we are currently, we are working to identify multiple distribution channels that can explain the entirety of the outbreak. We are

tracing back from multiples groupings of ill people located in diverse geographic areas. The reason for this is to find unique distribution channels that converge on a single source or grower. Our investigations are constantly evolving, with new information coming in and we communicate this information as appropriate. The FDA continues to recommend that the public not consume romaine lettuce grown in the Yuma growing region. To date, the available information indicates that romaine lettuce from the Yuma growing region is the source of the current outbreak of *E. coli* O157:H7 infections.

What are the Symptoms of *E. coli* O157:H7 Infection?

The symptoms of Shiga toxin-producing (STEC) *E. coli* infections vary for each person but often include severe stomach cramps and bloody diarrhea. If there is fever, it is usually not very high (less than 101 degrees [Fahrenheit](#) /less than 38.5 degrees Celsius). Most people get better within 5–7 days. Some infections are very mild, but others are severe or even life-threatening.

Around 5–10 percent of those who are diagnosed with STEC infection develop a potentially life-threatening complication, known as hemolytic uremic syndrome (HUS).

Symptoms of HUS include fever, abdominal pain, feeling very tired, decreased frequency of urination, small unexplained bruises or bleeding, and pallor. Most people with HUS recover within a few weeks, but some suffer permanent damage or die. People who experience these symptoms should seek emergency medical care immediately. Persons with HUS should be hospitalized because their kidneys may stop working (acute renal failure), but they may also develop other serious problems such as hypertension, chronic kidney disease, and neurologic problems.

Who is at Risk?

People of any age can become infected with Shiga toxin-producing (STEC) *E. coli*. Children under the age of 5 years, adults older than 65, and people with weakened immune systems are more likely than others to develop severe illness, including HUS, but even healthy older children and young adults can become seriously ill.

What Do Restaurants and Retailers Need To Do?

Retailers, restaurants, and other food service operators should not sell or serve any romaine lettuce from the winter growing areas in the Yuma region. If you cannot determine the source of your romaine lettuce, do not sell or serve it.

Retailers, restaurants, and other food service operators should always take steps to avoid the cross contamination of cutting surfaces and utensils through contact with potentially contaminated products. Retailers, restaurants, and other food service operators should always take steps to adequately control the temperature of cut leafy greens and to avoid cross contamination of cutting surfaces and utensils through contact with potentially contaminated products. To prevent cross contamination, you should follow the steps below:

- Wash and sanitize display cases and refrigerators where potentially contaminated products were stored.
- Wash and sanitize cutting boards, surfaces, and utensils used to prepare, serve, or store potentially contaminated products.
- Wash hands with hot water and soap following the cleaning and sanitation process.
- In accordance with the [FDA Food Code 2017](#), cut leafy greens, including romaine lettuce, require time/temperature control for safety and should be refrigerated at 41°F or lower.

Regular frequent cleaning and sanitizing of food contact surfaces and utensils used in food preparation may help to minimize the likelihood of cross-contamination.

What Do Consumers Need To Do?

Consumers should ask retailers where their romaine lettuce was sourced from and not eat or buy any romaine lettuce from the Yuma growing region.

If you have already bought romaine lettuce or products containing romaine lettuce, including bagged salads, whole heads, hearts, salad mixes or prepared salads, and cannot confirm the source, throw them away and do not eat them.

Consumers should always practice safe food handling and preparation measures. It is recommended that they wash hands, utensils, and surfaces with hot, soapy water before and after handling food.

For refrigerators and other food preparation surfaces and food cutting utensils that may have come in contact with contaminated foods, it is very important that the consumers thoroughly clean these areas and items.

Consumers should follow these simple steps:

- Wash the inside walls and shelves of the refrigerator, cutting boards and countertops; then sanitize them with a solution of one tablespoon of chlorine bleach to one gallon of hot water; dry with a clean cloth or paper towel that has not been previously used.
- Wash hands with warm water and soap for at least 20 seconds before and after handling food.
- Wipe up spills in the refrigerator immediately and clean the refrigerator regularly.
- Always wash hands with hot, soapy water following the cleaning and sanitization process.

- Persons who think they might have become ill from eating potentially contaminated foods should consult their health care provider.

Who Should be Contacted?

People who think they might have symptoms of an *E. coli* infection should consult their health care provider.

People with questions about food safety can call the FDA at 1-888-SAFEFOOD or consult the fda.gov website: <http://www.fda.gov>.