



NEWS RELEASE

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North Dakota Department of Health Investigates *Listeria* Case Linked to Cantaloupes *Health Officials are Stressing the Importance of Proper Food Handling*

BISMARCK, N.D. – The North Dakota Department of Health is investigating a single case of listeria associated with a multi-state outbreak investigation. The patient was a female age 60 or older who resides in Stutsman County. The patient became ill in early September and was hospitalized.

Currently, there have been 72 cases of listeria reported in 18 states. The source of the outbreak is whole cantaloupe grown at Jensen Farms in Granada, Colorado. The cantaloupes are sold under the name Rocky Ford cantaloupes and should not be consumed. Public health officials continue to collaborate with the U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA) to determine the extent of the distribution of the contaminated products. It appears that Walmart stores in North Dakota received this recalled product. The North Dakota Department of Health is in the process of following up with each location to make sure they were aware of the recall and all product has been sold or removed from the retail shelves. So far, health officials have not been able to identify if the case from North Dakota consumed any of the recalled cantaloupes, but the investigation is ongoing.

“Listeria is a serious infection caused by eating food contaminated with the bacterium *Listeria monocytogenes*,” said Sarah Weninger, epidemiologist with the North Dakota Department of Health. “Listeria generally only sickens high-risk groups, including pregnant women, newborns, people with weakened immune systems and the elderly. One way people in these high-risk groups can protect themselves is to thoroughly wash all raw produce.”

Symptoms of listeria include fever, muscle aches and sometimes nausea and diarrhea. Symptoms of listeria can develop up to two months after eating contaminated food. Infected pregnant women may experience a mild, flu-like illness. Infections during pregnancy can lead to miscarriage or stillbirth, premature delivery or infection of the newborn. High-risk individuals experiencing these

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symptoms within two months after eating contaminated food should seek medical care and tell the physician or health-care provider about eating the contaminated food.

In 2009, one case of listeria was reported in North Dakota. Listeria infections often are associated with contaminated raw fruits and vegetables, hot dogs, deli meats, cold cuts and soft cheeses. To prevent listeria infections, individuals should always thoroughly wash all raw produce; heat hot dogs, deli meats and cold cuts until they are steaming; and avoid milk or soft cheeses made with unpasteurized milk. According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, cleaning the inside walls and shelves of your refrigerator with hot water and liquid soap will help prevent cross contamination of other products.

More information about listeria and the current outbreak can found at:
www.cdc.gov/listeria/index.html.

For additional information, contact Lindsey VanderBusch or Sarah Weninger, North Dakota Department of Health, at 701.328.2378.

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