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<<http://www.news9.com/story/25158704/ok-state-dept-of-health-investigates-e-coli-outbreak>>

State health officials in Oklahoma are investigating a spike in an infection from a strain of _E. coli_. At least a dozen people, who have attended agricultural events around the state, were hospitalized as of late Thursday, 3 Apr 2014, according to the Oklahoma State Department of Health.

Health professionals say they are still in the early stages of their investigation. As of late 3 Apr 2014, officials had not located a source. One of the patients is fighting hard at OU Children's Hospital, according to family friends. "He's still in ICU in critical condition," said friend who has been in contact with the boy's mother.

"It does appear to be clustered in groups of people that have attended various agricultural events," said state health official Lauri Smithee, Ph.D. Smithee is the director of the state's acute disease service and has been busy looking for answers for the current spike in _E. coli_ cases. Smithee says Shiga toxin-producing _E. coli_ is the main concern. Mild to severe diarrhea that may be accompanied with blood are possible symptoms. The progression of the illness may harm the kidneys, according to Smithee.

Smithee and her colleagues are scrutinizing over 12 high-risk cases that have been reported since the middle of March 2014. Officials say they hope to identify a source in the next few days. Experts say the best way to prevent the spread of the illness is to wash your hands, especially after handling animals. Also, thoroughly clean all fruits, vegetables and meats.

The OBI will hold a blood drive for [the boy] at the women's building of the Woods County Fair Grounds in Alva on Tuesday, 8 Apr 2014, from 12 p.m. to 7 p.m. People may donate directly to this cause, or most any patient's cause, at any blood drive sponsored by OBI.