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Minnesota Department of Health

News Release

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Contact information

***Salmonella* cases linked to raw, frozen, stuffed chicken products**

Consumers urged to handle raw chicken products carefully, cook thoroughly

State health and agriculture officials said today that seven recent cases of salmonellosis in Minnesota have been linked to raw, frozen, breaded and pre-browned, stuffed chicken entrees.

The illnesses prompted health officials to remind consumers that the products may look cooked, but are in fact raw and should be handled carefully to avoid cross-contamination in the kitchen and then always cooked thoroughly.

Investigators from the Minnesota Department of Health (MDH) and the Minnesota Department of Agriculture (MDA) determined that the illnesses occurred in two separate outbreaks, involving two different strains of *Salmonella* bacteria in products from two distinct, unrelated producers.

In the first outbreak, four illnesses occurring from April 5 through June 8 were linked to Barber Foods Chicken Kiev. This product has a U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) stamped code of P-276. This product is sold at many different retailers, including grocery store chains. The four cases in this outbreak ranged in age from 19 to 82 years, all from the metro area, and two were hospitalized.

In the second outbreak, three people got sick from May 9 to June 8 after eating Antioch Farms brand Cordon Bleu raw stuffed chicken breast with a U.S. Department of Agriculture stamped code of P-1358. This product is sold at many different grocery store chains. The three cases were all adults in their 30s and 40s from the metro area, and two were hospitalized.

No deaths have been linked to either outbreak. MDH and MDA are working with USDA's Food Safety and Inspection Service (FSIS) on the investigation. The investigation is on-going.

With these two outbreaks, there have now been nine outbreaks of salmonellosis in Minnesota linked to these types of products since 1998. "These chicken products are raw, breaded and pre-browned and often found near pre-cooked products at the grocery store, so even though the current labels state that the product is raw, consumers could mistakenly think the product is pre-cooked," said Carlota Medus, epidemiologist for the Foodborne Illness Unit at MDH. Improvements were made to the labeling of such products in 2008, but three outbreaks have occurred from eating the raw, stuffed chicken products since 2014.

"Another problem is that consumers could accidentally contaminate their hands and kitchen surfaces prior to cooking," Medus said. "Since these products are pre-browned and often cooked from the frozen state, they may appear safer when handling than other raw meats that may be noticeably dripping juices."

Salmonella is sometimes present in raw chicken, which is why it is important for consumers to always follow safe food-handling practices. This includes cooking all raw poultry products to an internal temperature of at least 165 degrees Fahrenheit, which kills the *Salmonella* bacteria. "The problem arises when consumers don't realize that they are handling and preparing a raw product," said Alida Sorenson, an investigator for the MDA Dairy and Food Inspection Division. Consumers should handle them as carefully as they would any other raw meats, she said.

Consumers with these products in their freezers, if they choose to use them, should cook them thoroughly. Other important food handling practices include washing hands thoroughly after handling raw meat, keeping raw and cooked foods separate to avoid cross-contamination, and placing cooked meat on a clean plate or platter before serving. Consumers can find more information about safe food-handling practices on the MDH Web site at: Food Safety (<http://www.health.state.mn.us/foodsafety>).

Symptoms of salmonellosis include diarrhea, abdominal pain and cramps and fever. Symptoms usually begin within 12 to 72 hours after exposure, but can begin up to a week after exposure. *Salmonella* infections usually resolve in 5 to 7 days, but approximately 28 percent of laboratory-confirmed cases require hospitalization. Invasive infections (e.g., blood stream infections, meningitis) occasionally occur. In rare cases, *Salmonella* infection can lead to death, particularly in the elderly or those with weakened immune systems.

Approximately 700 cases of salmonellosis are reported each year in Minnesota.

More information on *Salmonella* and how to prevent it can be found on the MDH Web site at Salmonellosis (*Salmonella*) (<http://www.health.state.mn.us/divs/idepc/diseases/salmonellosis/index.html>).

NOTE TO EDITORS: Dr. Carlota Medus will be available for on-camera media interviews today from 2 p.m. to 4 p.m. at the Minnesota Department of Health, 625 Robert St. N., St. Paul, MN 55155. She will have product on display to discuss.

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