

Public Health Notice: Outbreak of *E. coli* infections linked to Fresh Express brand Sunflower Crisp Chopped Salad Kits

January 16, 2020 – Final update

This notice has been updated to advise that the outbreak appears to be over and the outbreak investigation has been closed.



Why you should take note

The Public Health Agency of Canada (PHAC) collaborated with provincial public health partners, the Canadian Food Inspection

Agency (CFIA), Health Canada, the [United States Centers for Disease Prevention and Control](#) (U.S. CDC), and the [United States Food and Drug Administration](#) (U.S. FDA) to investigate an outbreak of *E. coli* infections occurring across seven provinces. The outbreak appears to be over, and the investigation has been closed.

Based on the investigation findings, exposure to Fresh Express brand Sunflower Crisp Chopped Salad Kits was identified as a likely source of the outbreak. Many of the individuals who were sick reported having eaten Fresh Express brand Sunflower Crisp Chopped Salad Kits before their illnesses occurred.

On December 8, 2019, the CFIA issued a [food recall warning](#) for certain Fresh Express brand Sunflower Crisp Chopped Kits. The recalled salad kit packages were sold in Saskatchewan, Manitoba, Nunavut, Ontario, Quebec, New Brunswick, Nova Scotia, Prince Edward Island, Newfoundland Labrador, and may have been distributed in other provinces and territories. For more information on the recalled product, please consult the [CFIA's website](#).

Contaminated Fresh Express brand Sunflower Crisp Chopped Salad Kits that made people sick in this outbreak are past their shelf-life and should no longer be available. As a result, the Public Health Agency of Canada is no longer advising that Canadians avoid eating, selling or serving Fresh Express brand Sunflower Crisp Chopped Salad Kits sold in 315g packages, UPC 0 71279 30906 4, beginning with lot code Z, and best before date up to and including 07DEC19.

Investigation summary

In total, there were 28 cases of *E. coli* O157 illness linked to this outbreak in seven provinces: Manitoba (3), Ontario (11), Quebec (4), New Brunswick (4), Nova Scotia (4), Prince Edward Island (1), and Newfoundland and Labrador (1). Individuals were sick between November 5 and December 10, 2019. Eight individuals were hospitalized, including one person who developed hemolytic uremic syndrome, a type of kidney failure. No deaths were reported. Individuals who became ill were between 2 and 85 years of age. The majority of cases (68%) were female.

The collaborative outbreak investigation was initiated because of an increase in reports of *E. coli* O157 illnesses in Canada.

The U.S. CDC was also investigating an outbreak of *E. coli* O157 illnesses that have a similar genetic fingerprint to illnesses reported in this outbreak. The U.S. also identified Fresh Express Sunflower Crisp Chopped Salad Kits as a likely source of their outbreak and [issued advice](#) to American consumers, retailers, and restaurants.

The Canadian and U.S. investigations are ongoing to identify the cause of the contamination in the chopped salad kits. Romaine lettuce is one of the ingredients in the salad kit, but more information is needed to determine if it was the contaminated ingredient in the salad kits. The *E. coli* strain identified in this outbreak is different from the *E. coli* strain identified in the illnesses linked to [romaine lettuce from Salinas, California](#).

Who is most at risk

E. coli O157 is more likely to cause severe illness than other strains of *E. coli*. Pregnant women, those with weakened immune

systems, young children and older adults are most at risk for developing serious complications.

Most people who become ill from an *E. coli* infection will recover completely on their own. However, some people may have a more serious illness that requires hospital care or causes long-lasting health effects. In rare cases, some individuals may develop life-threatening complications, including stroke, kidney failure and seizures, which could result in death. It is possible for some people to be infected with the bacteria and to not get sick or show any symptoms, but to still be able to spread the infection to others.

What you should do to protect your health

The Public Health Agency of Canada reminds people to properly wash and sanitize drawers or shelves in refrigerators where Fresh Express brand Sunflower Crisp Chopped Salad Kits may have been previously stored.

Salad kits can be a carrier of *E. coli* bacteria that can make people sick. For consumers of salad kits, there is no way to fully eliminate the risk of an *E. coli* infection, but following [safe food handling practices for leafy greens](#) on a daily basis is the best way to avoid getting sick.

Symptoms

People infected with *E. coli* can have a wide range of symptoms. Some do not get sick at all, though they can still spread the infection to others. Others may feel as though they have a bad

case of upset stomach. In some cases, individuals become seriously ill and must be hospitalized.

The following symptoms can appear within one to ten days after contact with the bacteria:

- nausea
- vomiting
- headache
- mild fever
- severe stomach cramps
- watery or bloody diarrhea

Most symptoms end within five to ten days. There is no real treatment for *E. coli* infections, other than monitoring the illness, providing comfort, and preventing dehydration through proper hydration and nutrition. People who develop complications may need further treatment, such as dialysis for kidney failure. You should contact your health care provider if symptoms persist.

What the Government of Canada is doing

The Government of Canada is committed to food safety. The Public Health Agency of Canada leads the human health investigation into an outbreak, and is in regular contact with its federal, provincial and territorial partners to monitor the situation and to collaborate on steps to address an outbreak.

Health Canada provides food-related health risk assessments to determine whether the presence of a certain substance or microorganism poses a health risk to consumers.

The Canadian Food Inspection Agency conducts food safety investigations into the possible food source of an outbreak.

The Government of Canada will continue to update Canadians as new information related to this investigation becomes available.

Epidemiological information

Figure 1 below is an epidemiological curve for this outbreak. Outbreak investigators use this information to show when illnesses begin, when they peak, and when they trail off. It can take several weeks from the time a person becomes ill to when the illness is reported and testing confirms a link to the outbreak. Data are available for 28 cases.

Figure 1: Number of people infected with *E. coli* O157:H7

