

Outbreak of *E. coli* Infections in 12 States

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CDC, public health and regulatory officials in several states, and the U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA) are investigating a multistate outbreak of *E. coli* O157:H7 infections. A specific food item has not yet been identified as the source of this outbreak. This investigation notice provides information regarding the second of two [different *E. coli* O157:H7 outbreaks](#) that we are currently investigating.

At A Glance

- [Reported Cases](#): 23
- [States](#): 12
- Hospitalizations: 10
- Deaths: 0

CDC is not advising that people avoid any particular food at this time.

Investigators are still working to identify the food item that is making people sick.

[Take action](#) if you have symptoms of an *E. coli* infection:

- Talk to your healthcare provider.
- Write down what you ate in the week before you got sick.
- Report your illness to your local or state health department.
- Help us solve the outbreak by answering public health officials' questions about your illness.

Follow these general ways to [prevent getting sick from *E. coli*](#):

- Wash your hands after using the restroom or changing diapers, before and after preparing or eating food, and after contact with animals.
- Cook meats thoroughly. Use a food thermometer to check that the meat has reached a safe internal temperature.
- Don't cross-contaminate food preparation areas. Thoroughly wash hands, counters, cutting boards, and utensils after touching raw meat.
- Wash fruits and vegetables before eating, unless the package says the contents have been washed.
- Avoid raw milk, other unpasteurized dairy products, and unpasteurized juices.

Symptoms of *E. coli* Infection

- People usually get sick from Shiga toxin-producing *E. coli* (STEC) 2 to 8 days (average of 3 to 4 days) after swallowing the germ.
- Some people with a STEC infection may get a type of kidney failure called hemolytic uremic syndrome (HUS).
- *E. coli* infection is usually diagnosed by testing a stool sample.
- Antibiotics are not recommended for patients with suspected *E. coli* infections until diagnostic testing can be performed and *E. coli* infection is ruled out. Some studies have shown that administering antibiotics to patients with *E. coli* infections might increase their risk of developing HUS, and a benefit of treatment has not been clearly demonstrated.

Investigation Details

October 28, 2020

CDC, public health and regulatory officials in several states, and the U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA) are investigating a multistate outbreak of *E. coli* O157:H7 infections.

Public health investigators are using the [PulseNet](#) system to identify illnesses that may be part of this outbreak. PulseNet is the national subtyping network of public health and food regulatory agency laboratories coordinated by CDC. DNA fingerprinting is performed on *E. coli* bacteria isolated from ill people by using a standardized laboratory and data analysis method called [whole genome sequencing](#) (WGS). CDC PulseNet manages a national database of these sequences that are used to identify possible outbreaks. WGS gives investigators detailed information about the bacteria causing illness. In this investigation, WGS showed that bacteria isolated from ill people were closely related genetically. This means that people in this outbreak are more likely to share a common source of infection.

As of October 28, 2020, a total of 23 people infected with the outbreak strain of *E. coli* O157:H7 have been reported from 12 states. A list of the states and the number of cases in each can be found on the [Map of Reported Cases page](#).

Illnesses started on dates ranging from [August 17, 2020, to October 8, 2020](#). Ill people range in age from 5 to 81 years, with a median age of 21 years. Sixty-seven percent of ill people are female. Of 15 ill people with information available, 10 hospitalizations have been reported, including 2 people who developed hemolytic uremic syndrome (HUS), a type of kidney failure. No deaths have been reported.

Illnesses might not yet be reported due to the time it takes between when a person becomes ill and when the illness is reported. This takes an average of 2 to 4 weeks.

Investigation of the Outbreak

Investigators are reviewing [different types of data](#) to identify the source of this outbreak.

State and local public health officials are interviewing ill people to determine what they ate and other exposures in the week before they got sick. People have reported eating a variety of foods, including leafy greens. Of the 13 people interviewed to date, all reported eating various types of leafy greens, like iceberg lettuce (9), romaine lettuce (8), mixed bag lettuce (6), and spinach (9).

This outbreak is caused by the same strain of *E. coli* O157:H7 that caused an [outbreak linked to romaine lettuce in 2019](#). However, food linked to a previous outbreak alone is not enough to prove a link in another outbreak of the same strain. This is because different foods can be contaminated by the same strain of bacteria.

Public health officials are continuing to interview ill people and the FDA is conducting farm inspections, sampling, and traceback investigations.

A specific food item has not yet been identified as the source of this outbreak. CDC is not advising people avoid any particular food at this time.

CDC will provide more information as it becomes available.