

# Public Health Notice: Outbreak of *E. coli* infections linked to Hankook (Korean characters only) brand Original Kimchi

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## March 29, 2022: Final Update

This notice has been updated to reflect 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) and Health Canada to investigate an outbreak of *E. coli* O157 infections involving 2 provinces: Alberta and Saskatchewan. The outbreak appears to be over and the outbreak investigation has been closed.

Investigation findings identified exposure to Hankook (Korean characters only) brand Original Kimchi as the source of the outbreak.

The CFIA issued food recall warnings on [January 28, 2022](#) and [February 6, 2022](#) for Hankook (Korean characters only) brand Original Kimchi with best before dates of January 23, 2022 and January 29, 2022. Both products were sold in 2L containers with a net weight of 1670 g, and UPC code 6 23431 00030 4. The recalled products were distributed in British Columbia, Alberta, Saskatchewan, and Manitoba.

## Investigation summary

In total, 14 laboratory-confirmed cases of *E.coli* O157 illness were linked to this outbreak in the following provinces: Alberta (13) and Saskatchewan (1).

Individuals became sick between early December 2021 and early January 2022. No deaths or hospitalizations were reported. Individuals who became ill were between 0 and 61 years of age. The majority of cases (64%) were female.

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## 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 following advice applies to individuals, as well as retailers, distributors, manufacturers and food service establishments such as

hotels, restaurants, cafeterias, hospitals and long-term care homes, across Canada:

- Do not eat, use, sell or serve the recalled kimchi or any products made with the kimchi. Check to see if you have recalled food products at home. If you do, throw them out and wash your hands.
- Clean and sanitize all surfaces and storage areas that recalled kimchi or any products made with the recalled kimchi may have come in contact with, including countertops, containers, utensils, freezers, and refrigerators.
- If you have been diagnosed with an *E. coli* infection or any other gastrointestinal illness, do not cook food for other people.

## 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 protecting the health of Canadians from enteric disease outbreaks.

PHAC 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.

CFIA conducts food safety investigations into the possible food source of an outbreak.

## Epidemiological information

[Figure 1](#) is an epidemiological curve for this outbreak, which shows the numbers of new cases by week. 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 14 cases.

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

