

Public Health Notice: Outbreak of hepatitis A infections linked to imported fresh organic strawberries

May 27, 2022 - Original Notice

Why you should take note

The Public Health Agency of Canada (PHAC) is collaborating with provincial public health partners, the Canadian Food Inspection Agency (CFIA) and Health Canada to investigate an outbreak of [hepatitis A](#) infections involving two provinces: Alberta and Saskatchewan.

Based on investigation findings to date, consumption of imported fresh organic strawberries is the likely source of the outbreak. Many of the individuals who were ill reported having eaten fresh organic strawberries before their illnesses occurred.

These imported fresh organic strawberries were purchased between March 5 and 9, 2022 at Co-op stores in Alberta and Saskatchewan and are no longer available for purchase in Canada.

However, check your freezer for these strawberries if you had bought them and froze them to eat later. Do not eat these strawberries. Throw away any remaining fresh organic strawberries that were purchased between March 5 and 9, 2022 at Co-op stores in Alberta and Saskatchewan. If you don't know where the strawberries came from, throw them out.

If you suspect you have been exposed to these organic strawberries, or have symptoms consistent with hepatitis A infection, see your health care provider immediately. **Vaccination can prevent a hepatitis A infection if given within 14 days of exposure.**

This public health notice will be updated as the investigation evolves.

Investigation summary

As of May 27, 2022, there are 10 laboratory-confirmed cases of hepatitis A illness being investigated in two provinces: Alberta (4) and Saskatchewan (6). Individuals became ill between early and mid April 2022. Individuals who became ill are between 10 to 75 years of age. Four individuals have been hospitalized. No deaths have been reported.

The CFIA is conducting a food safety investigation into the fresh organic strawberries purchased between March 5 and 9, 2022 at Co-op stores in Alberta and Saskatchewan. Currently, there are no food recall warnings associated with this outbreak.

Who is most at risk

Anyone can become ill with hepatitis A infection. Most people who become ill from a hepatitis A infection will recover fully, but the risk of serious complications increases with older age and in those with underlying liver disease.

It is possible for some people to be infected with hepatitis A and to not get ill or show any symptoms, but to still be able to spread the virus to others.

What you should do to protect your health

- Check your freezer for these fresh organic strawberries purchased between March 5 and 9, 2022 at Co-op stores in Alberta and Saskatchewan. If you froze them to eat later, do not eat them. Throw away any remaining organic strawberries. If you don't know where the strawberries came from, throw them out.
- Wash and sanitize any drawers, shelves, or containers where the products were stored using a kitchen sanitizer (follow the

directions on the container) or prepare a bleach solution in a labelled spray bottle (you can use a ratio of 5 ml of household bleach to 750 ml of water) and rinse with water.

- If you have eaten these organic strawberries, purchased fresh and later frozen, or have symptoms consistent with hepatitis A, see your health care provider immediately. **Vaccination can prevent a hepatitis A infection if given within 14 days of exposure.**
- Wash your hands before and after preparing or eating food, and after using the washroom or changing diapers.
- If you have been diagnosed with hepatitis A, do not prepare or serve food and drinks to others.

Symptoms

Not everyone who is infected will have symptoms. Symptoms are more likely to occur in adults than in children. Symptoms of hepatitis A include:

- fever
- dark urine
- loss of appetite
- fatigue (tiredness)
- nausea and vomiting
- stomach cramps or abdominal pain
- jaundice (yellowing of the skin and eyes)

Symptoms typically appear 14 to 28 days after you have been exposed to hepatitis A, but may occur up to 50 days later.

Symptoms usually last less than two months. Mild symptoms may last only one or two weeks, while severe symptoms can last up to nine months.

What the Government of Canada is doing

The Government of Canada is committed to protecting the health of Canadians from enteric disease outbreaks.

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.

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 10 cases.

Figure 1: Number of people infected with hepatitis A

