

Loudoun County warns of E.coli exposure at Lovettsville goat farm

Loudoun Times-Mirror April 25, 2022

The Loudoun County Health Department has issued a public notification that several people came into contact with a type of bacterium called Shiga Toxin Producing E. coli (STEC) after petting goats at a Lovettsville farm, according to a health department press release.

The exposure is said to have occurred at Georges Mill Farm between March 6 and April 20, 2022.

Monday evening, Sam Kroiz, owner of Georges Mill, responded on Facebook, saying the bacterium was isolated and identified from the sick people, not the farm.

"We are associated in that the undisclosed number of sick people visited the baby goats and we closed visiting five days ago when we learned of the association from the Health Department," Kroiz said.

Kroiz sent another statement to the Times-Mirror on Wednesday:

"We feel horrible that several of our baby goat visitors got sick after their visit and that the Loudoun County Health Department considers contact with the baby goats as the source of the illness," the statement said. "We wish those sickened a speedy recovery and we have and will continue to make every effort to minimize the inherent risks of baby goat visiting. E. coli is a naturally-occurring, normal part of animal gastrointestinal systems, and we take every precaution to minimize contact issues such as hand washing and sanitizer stations.

"We take public health very seriously, so we closed baby goat visiting upon notification from the Health Department of our association with the ill individuals out of an abundance of caution, even though we don't believe there has been any greater risk this season than there has been at any time during the last decade of baby goat visiting," the statement goes on. "Visiting will remain closed as the baby goat season

comes to a close as normal at the end of April. We will open again next spring with our current risk-mitigation systems, as well as any additional recommendations from the Health Department, and continue to be a conduit for interactive experiences with animals for our community in as safe a way as possible given the inherent risks.”

Several individuals experienced diarrhea and other symptoms of illness, according to the release. The bacterium was isolated and identified by the Virginia Division of Consolidated Laboratory Services.

The health department said coming into direct contact with animals, particularly livestock, presents a risk for illnesses. People should remember that, while animal interactions can be fun and educational, it’s always important to practice healthy habits around pets and other animals, such as washing your hands after being in contact with animals, according to health department officials.

The Loudoun County Health Department is communicating directly with those who are known to have come in contact with goats at Georges Mill Farm, according to the release. Anyone who had contact with the goats during the time frame mentioned, and who have not yet communicated with the Health Department should: Monitor for illness and seek medical attention if you become ill. Let your healthcare provider know of your possible exposure to assist in your diagnosis and treatment. Report your exposure to the Loudoun County Health Department by completing this short survey. The staff at the farm have assisted the Health Department in identifying who may be at risk of illness and by helping to prevent future infections, the release states. There is no evidence of ongoing risk to visitors at Georges Mill Farm, it says. Symptoms of E. coli illness usually start two to four days after exposure, but can occur as late as 12 hours later, or as long as 10 days after exposure. Symptoms can include diarrhea, stomach cramps, fever, chills and bloody stool, according to the release. For more information on how to stay healthy at animal exhibits, visit the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

Editor’s note: This story has been updated with a new statement from Georges Mill Farm.