

E. coli Outbreak with Unknown Food Source



Investigation Notice

Posted September 1, 2022

Fast Facts

- Illnesses: 97 (13 new)
- Hospitalizations: 43 (5 new)
- Deaths: 0
- [States](#): 6 (2 new)
- Recall: No
- Investigation status: Active

Update on the Source

A specific food has not yet been confirmed as the source of this outbreak, but many sick people reported eating sandwiches with romaine lettuce at Wendy's restaurants in Indiana, Michigan, Ohio, and Pennsylvania before getting sick. Based on this information, Wendy's has taken the precautionary measure of removing the romaine lettuce being used in sandwiches from restaurants in that region. Wendy's uses a different type of romaine lettuce for salads. Investigators are working to confirm whether romaine lettuce is the source of this outbreak, and whether romaine lettuce used in Wendy's sandwiches was served or sold at other businesses. Wendy's is fully cooperating with the investigation.

What You Should Do

CDC is *not* advising people to avoid eating at Wendy's restaurants or to stop eating romaine lettuce.

- Wendy's has taken the precautionary measure of removing the romaine lettuce being used in sandwiches from restaurants in this region.

- At this time, there is no evidence to indicate that romaine lettuce sold in grocery stores, served in other restaurants, or in people's homes is linked to this outbreak.
- CDC will update this advice if the investigation identifies foods to avoid.

Call your healthcare provider right away if you have any of these severe *E. coli* symptoms:

- Diarrhea and a fever higher than 102°F
- Diarrhea for more than 3 days that is not improving
- Bloody diarrhea
- So much vomiting that you cannot keep liquids down
- Signs of dehydration, such as:
 - Not peeing much
 - Dry mouth and throat
 - Feeling dizzy when standing up

If you have *E. coli* symptoms, [help public health officials solve this outbreak](#):

- Write down what you ate in the week before you got sick.
- Report your illness to your [local or state health department](#).
- Answer public health officials' questions about your illness.

What Businesses Should Do

- Currently, CDC is not advising businesses to stop selling or serving any foods.

Symptoms of *E. coli*

- Most people infected with Shiga toxin-producing *E. coli* experience severe stomach cramps, diarrhea (often bloody), and vomiting.
 - Symptoms usually start 3 to 4 days after swallowing the bacteria.
 - Most people recover without treatment within 5 to 7 days.
- Some people may develop serious kidney problems (hemolytic uremic syndrome, also called HUS) and need to be hospitalized.

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Investigators are continuing to collect [different types of data](#) to identify the food source of this multistate outbreak of *E. coli* O157:H7 infections. A specific food has not yet been confirmed as the source of this outbreak, but many sick people reported eating burgers and sandwiches with romaine lettuce at Wendy's restaurants before getting sick.

Epidemiologic Data

Since the last update on August 25, 2022, 13 more illnesses have been reported to CDC. As of August 31, 2022, a total of 97 people infected with the outbreak strain of *E. coli* O157:H7 have been reported from six states (see [map](#)). Illnesses started on dates ranging from July 26, 2022, to August 15, 2022 (see [timeline](#)).

Sick people range in age from 3 to 94 years, with a median age of 22 years, and 55% are male. Of 81 people with information available, 43 have been hospitalized and 10 developed hemolytic uremic syndrome, a serious condition that can cause kidney failure. No deaths have been reported.

The true number of sick people in this outbreak is likely higher than the number reported, and the outbreak may not be limited to the states with known illnesses. This is because some of the recent illnesses have not yet been reported to [PulseNet](#) as it usually takes [3 to 4 weeks](#) to determine if a sick person is part of an outbreak. In addition, some people recover without medical care and are not tested for *E. coli*.

State and local public health officials have been interviewing people about the foods they ate in the week before they got sick. Among 67 people with detailed food history, 54 (81%) reported eating at a Wendy's restaurant in the week before their illness started. The Wendy's restaurants where sick people ate are in Indiana, Michigan, Ohio, and Pennsylvania. People reported eating a variety of menu items, including burgers and sandwiches. Of 54 people with detailed information about what they ate at Wendy's, 37 (69%) reported eating romaine lettuce served on burgers and sandwiches. Investigators continue to analyze data at the ingredient level to determine if there are any other possible foods that could be the source of the outbreak.