

E. coli Outbreak Linked to Raw Cheddar Cheese



Food Safety Alert

Posted February 28, 2024

Fast Facts

- Illnesses: 11
- Hospitalizations: 5
- Deaths: 0
- [States](#): 5
- Recall: No
- Investigation status: Active



Contaminated Food

RAW FARM brand raw cheddar cheese

- Flavors include original and jalapeno
- All sizes of blocks and shredded packages
- Sold nationwide

What You Should Do

- **While this investigation is ongoing, do not eat any Raw Farm brand raw cheddar cheese.** Throw them away or return them to where you bought them.
- **Wash items and surfaces** that may have touched the contaminated cheese using hot soapy water or a dishwasher.
- **Call your healthcare provider** 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
 - Feeling very tired
 - Losing pink color in cheeks and inside the lower eyelids

What Businesses Should Do

- **While this investigation is ongoing, do not sell or serve Raw Farm brand raw cheddar cheese.**
- **Wash and sanitize items and surfaces** that may have come in contact with the contaminated cheese.

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 after 5 to 7 days.
- Some people may develop serious kidney problems (hemolytic uremic syndrome, also called HUS) and would need to be hospitalized.

Investigation Details

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CDC, public health and regulatory officials in several states, and the U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA), are collecting [different types of data](#) to investigate a multistate outbreak of *E. coli* O157:H7 infections.

Epidemiologic data show that Raw Farm brand raw cheddar cheese is making people in this outbreak sick.

Epidemiologic Data

Since the last update, one new illness and one new state were reported. One sick person in New Jersey reported eating raw cheddar cheese during travel to Colorado in the week before they got sick. As of February 28, 2024, a total of 11 people infected with the outbreak strain of *E. coli* have been reported from 5 states (see [map](#)). Illnesses started on dates ranging from October 18, 2023, to February 5, 2024 (see [timeline](#)). Of 11 people with information available, 5 have been hospitalized and 2 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 much higher than the number reported, and the outbreak may not be limited to the states with known illnesses. This is because many people recover without medical care and are not tested for *E. coli*. In addition, recent illnesses may not yet be reported as it usually takes [3 to 4 weeks](#) to determine if a sick person is part of an outbreak.

Public health officials collect many different types of information from sick people, including their age, race, ethnicity, other demographics, and the foods they ate in the week before they got sick. This information provides clues to help investigators identify the source of the outbreak.

The table below has information about sick people in this outbreak (“n” is the number of people with information available for each demographic).

Table of demographic information (n is the number of people with information available)

Demographics	Information
Age (n=11)	Range from 2 to 75 years Median age of 25 years
Sex (n=11)	36% female 64% male
Race (n=10)	90% White 10% Asian
Ethnicity (n=10)	100% non-Hispanic 0% Hispanic

State and local public health officials are interviewing people about the foods they ate in the week before they got sick. Of the 9 people interviewed, 7 (78%) specifically reported eating Raw Farm brand raw cheddar cheese. This percentage was significantly higher than the 4.9% of respondents who reported eating any raw milk cheese in the [FoodNet Population Survey](#)—a survey that helps estimate how often people eat various foods linked to diarrheal illness. This difference suggests that people in this outbreak got sick from eating Raw Farm brand raw cheddar cheese.

Laboratory and Traceback Data

Public health investigators are using the [PulseNet](#) system to identify illnesses that may be part of this outbreak. CDC PulseNet manages a national database of DNA fingerprints of bacteria that cause foodborne illnesses. DNA fingerprinting is performed on bacteria using a method called [whole genome sequencing \(WGS\)](#).

WGS showed that bacteria from all sick people’s samples are closely related genetically. This suggests that people in this outbreak got sick from the same food.

Officials in California, Colorado, and Utah collected various Raw Farm products for testing including raw milk, raw butter, raw cheddar cheese, and raw kefir. So far, no samples have detected *E. coli*. Additional testing is ongoing.

Public Health Actions

On February 26, 2024, Raw Farm brand withdrew their recall. However, CDC continues to advise people not to eat, sell, or serve Raw Farm brand raw cheddar cheese while the investigation is ongoing.

