

Salmonella outbreak associated with IHOP in Bellevue

AT-A-GLANCE

Cases	32
Hospitalizations	6
Deaths	0
Status	Investigation is ongoing
Location	IHOP 14747 NE 20th St, Bellevue, WA 98007
Illness Onset Date Range	October 23, 2023 - July 2, 2024
Meal Date Range	October 16, 2023 - June 27, 2024
Current Inspection Rating	NEEDS TO IMPROVE

Summary, updated August 8, 2024

Public Health is investigating a continuing outbreak of salmonellosis (infections caused by *Salmonella* bacteria) associated with IHOP in Bellevue.

Public Health's investigation suggests this specific strain of *Salmonella* was introduced into this IHOP by [Salmonella-contaminated diced onions that made people sick across the United States in 2023](#). The contaminated onions were recalled and thrown away in October 2023 at this IHOP.

However, on April 2, 2024, this *Salmonella* strain was identified in the restaurant through environmental testing and people have continued to get sick from the same strain of *Salmonella* since then. This suggests *Salmonella* bacteria, which is known to live on surfaces like plastic and steel for a long time, is still in the restaurant, even after multiple closures, deep cleanings, and throwing away potentially contaminated food and equipment.

This outbreak may not be over since it often takes at least 3-4 weeks before Public Health can connect someone's sickness, like salmonellosis, to a specific outbreak. You can read more about this 3-4 week timeline on the [CDC's foodborne outbreak webpage](#).

Until this outbreak is over, Public Health will continue to investigate and provide updates while working with this IHOP to stop the spread of *Salmonella*.

Key actions that Public Health is taking with this IHOP include:

- Regular deep cleanings and disinfection of the restaurant;
- Highlight and assess food safety practices of restaurant staff;
- Making sure restaurant staff are not working while infected with *Salmonella*; and
- Testing restaurant surfaces for *Salmonella* whenever new cases of *Salmonella* are identified

KEY RESOURCES

- [Report a possible foodborne illness](#)
Did you or others in your party get sick after eating food prepared by a King County food business? Call [206-296-4774](tel:206-296-4774) or toll-free, 1-800-325-6165, ext. 6-4774. Open Monday - Friday, 8 am to 5 pm.
- [File a food safety complaint](#)
If you witnessed a possible food safety violation, file a complaint with our investigative team.
- [Food business closures](#)
A list of temporary food business closures in King County.

About *Salmonella*

Salmonellosis is a bacterial infection that is often spread through the fecal-oral route, through contaminated food and water, or through contact with animals and their environments. Symptoms of salmonellosis include nausea, vomiting, diarrhea, headache, fever, chills, and abdominal cramping. Illness typically lasts several days, and people can spread infection to others even after symptoms resolve.

Sick people with a suspected *Salmonella* infection should not work in food handling, patient care, or childcare while having vomiting or diarrhea.

To prevent *Salmonella* infection:

- Wash hands with soap and water after going to the bathroom, changing diapers, touching animals, and before eating or preparing food.
 - Cook all meats thoroughly, especially poultry.
 - Wash cutting boards and counters used for meat or poultry preparation immediately after use to avoid cross contaminating other foods.
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More information

- [Salmonella facts](#), Public Health — Seattle & King County
- [Salmonella facts](#), foodsafety.gov

Illnesses

Since late 2023, Public Health has learned of 32 people infected with the same strain of *Salmonella*. This includes one IHOP in Bellevue restaurant staff member who regularly ate food from the workplace. Of these 32 people, 22 became sick after eating a wide variety of food and drinks at this IHOP (many of these food items did not include onions). Public Health has been unable to confirm if the remaining 10 (of 32) people infected with the same strain had consumed food or drinks from this IHOP. The people with *Salmonella* ranged in age from 1 to 78 years old.

Note: through ongoing laboratory testing, interviews, data collection, and analysis, we have been able to confirm additional *Salmonella* cases linked to this outbreak. The updated count now includes people that are not King County residents.

Public Health actions

In January 2024, the Washington State Department of Health alerted us of three *Salmonella* cases that matched the [national Salmonella outbreak from contaminated fresh diced onions](#). Public Health's investigation then identified that all three people became sick after eating at IHOP in Bellevue. We didn't identify a specific food or drink that all had eaten.

Environmental Health investigators visited the restaurant and found:

- The restaurant had already gotten rid of all the recalled onions in October 2023, and
- There were no identified concerns with the food preparation process.

IHOP completed a deep cleaning and provided food safety training for restaurant staff.

In March, Public Health re-opened the investigation after we found out about another person who became sick after eating at this IHOP.

In response, Public Health tested surfaces in the restaurant. One tested positive for the same strain of *Salmonella* that the sick people had. Public Health then:

- Closed the restaurant on April 10 and had them do a deep cleaning and disinfection.

- Allowed the restaurant to reopen April 12 after Environmental Health investigators went to the restaurant to make sure they did a deep cleaning and disinfection of the restaurant.

Repeat testing of the restaurant surfaces after they reopened were negative for *Salmonella*. Note: because only small areas of the restaurant can be tested at any one time, negative tests do not prove that *Salmonella* is not still there.

In May 2024, Public Health found out about more people who became sick after eating at the restaurant after reopening in April.

In response, Public Health:

- Closed the restaurant on May 24.
- Tested various surfaces in the restaurant, which were negative for *Salmonella*.
- Made the restaurant do an extensive deep cleaning and disinfection, which was done by an industrial cleaning company.
- Required regular testing of the restaurant surfaces for *Salmonella*, which will take place every 3 months for the next year.
- Required restaurant management to make sure restaurant staff are not sick before they start work, every time.
- Required more frequent cleaning and disinfection of the restaurant until this outbreak is over.
- Allowed the restaurant to reopen on June 7.

Restaurant management also voluntarily tested all staff. One restaurant staff member tested positive for *Salmonella* but had no signs of being sick. Public Health made sure that the staff member had two negative *Salmonella* results before returning to work.

In June, Public Health again found out about more people who became sick after eating at IHOP in Bellevue after they reopened June 7.

In response, Public Health:

- Closed the restaurant again on June 27.
- Tested the restaurant surfaces, which were negative for *Salmonella*.
- Made sure the restaurant did more extensive cleaning and disinfection.
- Allowed the restaurant to reopen on July 6, 2024.

Laboratory testing

Everyone except two people had testing that identified the same strain of *Salmonella*, identified as *Salmonella* Thompson, based on DNA fingerprinting (whole genome sequencing or WGS). The two people that did not have testing had symptoms consistent with salmonellosis and ate food or

drink at IHOP in Bellevue with people that did have testing that identified the same strain of *Salmonella*.

On April 2, 2024, Public Health environmental testing at IHOP in Bellevue identified the same strain of *Salmonella* Thompson in the restaurant.

These human and environmental laboratory results suggest ongoing contamination of food or drink from IHOP in Bellevue as the likely source of the people's *Salmonella* infection.