

E. coli Outbreak Linked to Organic Walnuts



Food Safety Alert

Posted April 30, 2024

Fast Facts

- Illnesses: 12
- Hospitalizations: 7
- Deaths: 0
- [States](#): 2
- Recall: Yes
- Investigation status: Active



Recalled Food

Gibson Farms, Inc. organic walnut halves and pieces

- Sold in bulk bins
- Expiration dates between May 21, 2025, and June 7, 2025

- Distributed to natural food and co-op [stores](#) in AK, AR, AZ, CA, CO, HI, ID, KS, LA, MT, NE, NM, NV, OR, SD, TX, UT, WA and WY
- Lot codes 3325-043 and 3341-501

Almost all sick people purchased organic walnuts from bulk bins in food co-ops or natural food stores in California and Washington.

What You Should Do

- **If you bought organic walnut halves and pieces from bulk containers, see if yours might be part of the recall.** Check your pantries, refrigerators, and freezers for walnuts. If you can't tell if it's part of the recall, it's safer not to eat them.
 - Ask the store where you purchased if recalled walnuts were sold.
 - Some stores may repackage bulk walnut halves and pieces into plastic clamshells or bags.
 - FDA has a [list of stores](#) that may have received these walnuts.
- **Wash items and surfaces** that may have touched the walnuts 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

What Businesses Should Do

- **Check to see if you received Gibson Farms, Inc. organic walnut halves and pieces with lot codes listed above. Do not sell or serve them.**
- **Discard the contents of the bins and use extra care to clean and sanitize the bins before refilling.**
- **Wash and sanitize containers including bulk bins, surfaces, and other items** that may have come in contact with recalled walnuts.

- When possible, contact customers or place signs at locations where the walnuts were sold to help notify consumers.

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 infections.

Epidemiologic and traceback data show that organic walnuts distributed by Gibson Farms, Inc. may be contaminated with *E. coli* and may be making people sick.

Epidemiologic Data

As of April 30, 2024, 12 people infected with the outbreak strain of *E. coli* have been reported from 2 states ([see map](#)). Illnesses started on dates ranging from February 1, 2024, to April 4, 2024 ([see timeline](#)). Of 11 people with information available, 7 (64%) have been hospitalized. Two patients have 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=12)	Range from 6 to 84 years Median age of 57
Sex (n=12)	67% female 33% male
Race (n=10)	90% White 10% African American/Black
Ethnicity (n=10)	100% non-Hispanic

State and local public health officials are interviewing people about the foods they ate in the week before they got sick. Of the 10 people interviewed, all 10 (100%) reported eating walnuts. This percentage was significantly higher than the 26% of respondents who reported eating walnuts 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 walnuts. Of 10 people interviewed, almost all reported buying organic walnuts from bulk bins in food co-ops or natural food stores. Investigators identified two illness subclusters of two people each who purchased bulk bin walnuts from the same store location.

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 sick people's samples are closely related genetically. This suggests that people in this outbreak got sick from the same food.

Traceback data collected by FDA determined that Gibson Farms, Inc was the supplier of organic walnuts sold in bulk bins at stores where ill people shopped.

Public Health Actions

Do not eat, sell or serve recalled walnuts.