

E. coli Outbreak Linked to Onions Served at McDonald's

Food safety alert

Investigation start date: October 22, 2024

Investigation status: Open

Recall issued: Yes

New as of 10/30: Fresh, slivered onions served on Quarter Pounders and other menu items from McDonald's are the likely source of this outbreak. More illnesses have been reported, but they are from before McDonald's and Taylor Farms took action to remove onions from food service locations. Due to the product actions taken by both companies, CDC believes the risk to the public is very low.

Fast Facts

- **Cases:** 90 (15 new)
- **Hospitalizations:** 27 (5 new)
- **Deaths:** 1 (0 new)
- **States:** 13 (0 new)

[Updates](#)[Locations](#)[Timeline](#)

Situation summary

CDC, FDA, USDA-FSIS, and public health officials in multiple states are investigating an outbreak of *E. coli* O157:H7 infections. Most people in this outbreak are reporting eating the Quarter Pounder hamburger at McDonald's before becoming sick. McDonald's stopped using slivered onions on the Quarter Pounder hamburger in some states to try to prevent more people from getting sick.

Epidemiologic and traceback information show that fresh, slivered onions are the likely source of illness in this outbreak. Taylor Farms, the supplier of slivered onions to the affected McDonald's locations also recalled onions. Food service businesses were contacted directly by Taylor Farms. The likelihood of contaminated onions still being available for sale is low.

Recalled food

Slivered onions served on McDonald's Quarter Pounder hamburgers likely made people sick.

- Most sick people in this outbreak reported eating a McDonald's menu item containing fresh, slivered onions before they got sick.

- McDonald's pulled fresh, slivered onions and fresh quarter pound beef patties while a specific food ingredient was being determined as the source of illness. That likely source is now believed to be onions.

Taylor Farms recalled yellow onions

- Food service operators were contacted directly and told not to sell or serve recalled onions.
- The onions were only distributed to food service businesses, such as restaurants. It is not likely that recalled onions went to grocery stores or directly to consumers.

What you should do

Because these onions were recalled and are no longer available for sale to food service operators, it is not necessary to avoid eating onions or other foods made with onions.

Call your healthcare provider if you have 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

- Food service operators should not sell, eat, or serve Taylor Farms recalled yellow onions.
- Taylor Farms contacted businesses directly.

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.
- For more information about *E. coli*, see the [About *Escherichia coli* Infection](#) page

October 30, 2024

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

Epidemiologic and traceback data show that fresh, slivered onions served at McDonald's were the likely source of this outbreak.

Epidemiologic data

As of October 30, 90 people infected with the outbreak strain of *E. coli* O157:H7 have been reported from 13 states. Illnesses started on dates ranging from Sept 27, 2024, to October 16, 2024. Of 83 people with information available, 27 have been hospitalized, and 2 people developed hemolytic uremic syndrome, a serious condition that can cause kidney failure. One death has been reported from an older adult in Colorado. This person is not one of those who developed HUS.

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).

Demographics

Information

Age

(n=90)

Range from 13 to 88 years

Median age of 30

Sex

(n=90)

41% female

59% male

Race

(n=82)

96% White

3% African American/Black

0% Native American or Alaska Native

0% Asian

0% Native Hawaiian or other Pacific Islander

1% reported more than one race

Ethnicity

(n=79)

92% non-Hispanic

8% Hispanic

State and local public health officials are interviewing people about the foods they ate in the week before they got sick. Of the 62 people interviewed, all 62 (100%) report eating at McDonald's. Fifty-eight people were able to remember specific menu items they ate at McDonald's. Forty-eight of 58

people (83%) reported a menu item containing fresh, slivered onions. Forty-six of 58 people (79%) reported a menu item made with fresh quarter pound beef patties. Overall, three people reported menu items that contained fresh, slivered onions, but not fresh quarter pound beef patties. One person reported a menu item with a fresh quarter pound beef patty but without fresh, slivered onions

Some people in this outbreak reported traveling to other states before their illness started. At least three people ate at McDonald's during their travel.

Traceback information and laboratory data

FDA has initiated inspections at a Taylor Farms processing center in Colorado and an onion grower of interest in Washington state. FDA is unable to implicate a grower at this time.

On October 22, Taylor Farms, the supplier of slivered onions for affected McDonald's locations, initiated a recall of yellow onions. Customers were contacted directly by Taylor Farms and asked to remove products. FDA is working closely with the implicated firms and will continue to provide updates including any additional recalls that might be needed for businesses who received recalled onions.

On October 22, the Colorado Department of Agriculture (CDA) laboratories analyzed subsamples from all the lots of McDonald's brand fresh and frozen beef patties collected from various McDonald's locations in Colorado and found them to be negative for *E. coli*. All [beef testing](#) has been completed.

FSIS has conducted a thorough investigation, including traceback of beef patties served on Quarter Pounders at McDonald's, and evidence does not point to ground beef as the likely source of contamination. FSIS used specific meal information reported by ill people to trace beef patties through the supply chain to the establishments where they were produced and did not identify a beef source. FSIS will continue to work closely with federal and state partners.

Public health actions

Because onions have been recalled, it is not necessary to avoid eating onions or other foods made with onions. Call your healthcare provider if you have severe *E. coli* symptoms.