

Outbreak tied to chicken livers: 6 sick, high-end restaurants 'mortified'

Undercooked chicken liver pate from two restaurants and a store in Oregon are part of a multi-state outbreak of campylobacter. *(The Oregonian/file photo)*

By Lynne Terry | lterry@oregonian.com

Email the author | [Follow on Twitter](#)

on February 04, 2014 at 5:21 PM, updated February 04, 2014 at 6:28 PM

A high-end chicken product enjoyed in high-end restaurants in Portland is part of a small food poisoning outbreak in Oregon.

Health officials issued a public health alert Tuesday, saying six people who consumed undercooked or raw chicken livers were infected with campylobacter, a common foodborne pathogen. Three people live in Oregon and two others were visiting the state from Ohio. The outbreak includes one person in Washington state who got sick after consuming chicken liver pills. Most of the others ate chicken liver pate.

But in all cases, the chicken livers were processed at Draper Valley Farms in Vernon, Wash. Dr. Katrina Hedberg, state epidemiologist in Oregon, said the processor sold them raw to restaurants and stores, which turned them into pate.

She said one person ate chicken liver pate at the Heathman; another dined at Wildwood; the third Oregonian purchased chicken liver pate prepared and sold by a Market of Choice store.

"We have been letting the restaurants and stores know what's been happening," Hedberg said. "They're mortified."

The restaurants and Market of Choice have either stopped making chicken liver pate or are now cooking it thoroughly. That's the only way to kill campylobacter and most other harmful pathogens.

"You have to cook it through and through, just like chicken or ground beef," Hedberg said.

Draper Valley did not issue a recall. Under U.S. Department of Agriculture regulations, processors are allowed to sell chicken livers tainted with a high level of campylobacter. In fact, one study showed that 77 percent are contaminated with the bacteria.

"This is a high-risk food," Hedberg said.

This is only the second multi-state campylobacter outbreak in the United States traced to chicken livers. In the first, **six people in New England were sickened in 2012.**

There have been so few outbreaks because few people eat chicken livers, Hedberg said. "I don't know how many people eat them," she said. "It's probably less than 1 percent." Though not a household name, campylobacter is well known to epidemiologists. Like salmonella, it causes gastrointestinal symptoms. Every year the bacteria sickens 600 to 900 people in Oregon and 1,500 in Washington state.

This is the second warning in Oregon within a week about campylobacter. On Friday, **Coos County Oyster Co.**, recalled all of its shucked and in-shell oysters in another campylobacter outbreak that sickened three people.

The public health alert issued Tuesday stopped short of advising the public not to eat chicken liver pate. But it did say that it's difficult to tell whether pate is cooked thoroughly because it's made with a blend of ingredients and warned consumers that it's often undercooked to ensure a silky texture.

-- Lynne Terry