

Dutch firm in salmonella outbreak supplied salmon to Costco

Smoked salmon tainted with salmonella has sickened hundreds of people in the Netherlands, authorities said, sparking major recalls there and in the U.S.

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THE HAGUE, Netherlands —

Smoked salmon tainted with salmonella has sickened hundreds of people in the Netherlands, authorities said, sparking major recalls there and in the U.S.

U.S. health authorities say they are also investigating whether the salmon could be at the root of a multi-state outbreak of the illness.

The Netherlands' National Institute for Public Health and the Environment said the salmon was traced to a Dutch company called Foppen, which sells fish to many major supermarkets in the Netherlands and stores around the world.

In the U.S. Foppen said it only supplied the fish to Costco Wholesale Corp. It did not believe the contaminated fish was sold to any other countries.

The Dutch public health institute said that around 200 people - and likely more - have been sickened in the Netherlands by a strain of the bacteria called Salmonella Thompson.

A representative for the U.S. Centers for Disease and Control Prevention, Lola Russell, says the federal agency has 85 recorded cases of the same strain from 27 states starting from July 1. Without an outbreak, she said the average number of such cases over that time would be about 30.

"We've investigating a possible link between the cases in the U.S. and cases in the Netherlands," Russell said.

That process entails state public health officials interviewing patients to find out what they may have eaten before they got sick, including the smoked salmon.

Russell said 10 people have been hospitalized, with no deaths.

Craig Wilson, vice president of food safety at Costco, said the company immediately pulled the smoked salmon from shelves after receiving a call from Foppen late Monday. Costco also blocked sale of the salmon in stores, meaning the products won't scan at registers.

The smoked salmon was sold under the Foppen name, as well as under Costco's store-brand name, Kirkland. Wilson did not know how much of the product was sold.

Customers who purchased the items will be called by CostCo to notify them of the recall, Wilson said. The calls will be followed up with a letter.

Wilson said Costco's independent testing of the smoked salmon hasn't yet turned up any positive results for salmonella. He said the company has not received any reports of illnesses.

In the Netherlands Foppen estimated the number of infections could rise.

Since the company set up a public information phone line two days ago, de Vries said about 1,400 people had called and around 350 of the callers "reported symptoms consistent with a salmonella infection."

Those infected by the salmonella bacteria can suffer symptoms including fever, vomiting and diarrhea.

Foppen, which processes fish in the Netherlands and at a factory in Greece, is investigating the cause of the outbreak.

"The investigation into the cause is under way and has been narrowed down to one production line at one factory (in Greece)," De Vries said. "We can't yet say what the cause of the infection was."

Foppen has halted all production of smoked salmon until the investigation is completed, he added.