Minnesota Department of Health

News Release

October 26, 2013

Contact information

Health officials investigate *E. coli* O157 infections at pumpkin patch petting zoo

Three cases confirmed so far

Three Minnesota residents have become ill with confirmed *E. coli* O157:H7 infections after contact with animals at Dehn's Pumpkins in Dayton, MN, the Minnesota Department of Health reported today.

The three cases were all children, ranging in age from 15 months to 7 years and are residents of the Twin Cities metro area. One child is hospitalized with hemolytic uremic syndrome (HUS), a serious complication of an *E. coli* infection characterized by kidney failure. The others were not hospitalized and are recovering. Routine monitoring by the health department identified the *E. coli* O157:H7 cases, which all have bacterial isolates with the same DNA fingerprint. These cases visited the farm on October 12 or 13, and became ill on October 16 or 18.

The Minnesota Department of Health is in the process of following up with any groups that visited the farm in order to help determine if more people have become ill. At this time, two additional people have reported symptoms consistent with *E. coli* O157:H7 infection and are currently being tested. These people visited Dehn's on October 18, raising concern that exposures also could have occurred after the weekend of October 12-13.

All of the cases reported having contact with cattle and/or goats at Dehn's. The farm owners have been cooperating fully with the investigation and public access to the cattle and goat areas is being prohibited. The rest of the farm, including the pumpkin patch, remains open for business.

E. coli O157:H7 is commonly found in ruminant animals such as cattle and goats, and this type of exposure is not unique to Dehn's Pumpkins. Outbreaks associated with contact with farm animals are documented virtually every year in Minnesota. Therefore, people who contact ruminants at any venue, public or private, are at risk for infection with *E. coli* O157:H7, as well as a variety of other germs. People typically become ill from contact with farm animals or their environment by getting bits of feces on their hands after touching the animals or contaminated surfaces, then swallowing the germs while eating, drinking or during other hand-to-mouth activities. Contamination can be present on the fur or in the saliva of animals, on the ground where the animals are kept, or on surfaces such as fence railings of animal pens.

Symptoms of illness caused by *E. coli* O157:H7 typically include severe stomach cramps and diarrhea, often with bloody stools, but only a low-grade or no fever. People typically become ill two to five days after exposure, but this time period can range from one to at least eight days. Most people recover in five to 10 days; however, *E. coli* O157:H7 infections sometimes lead to HUS, most commonly in children and the elderly.

Health officials say anyone who visited Dehn's Pumpkins since October 12 and develops symptoms of *E. coli* O157:H7 infection should contact their health care provider immediately and inform them of their possible involvement in this outbreak. Diarrhea associated with *E. coli* O157:H7 infection should NOT be treated with antibiotics, as this practice might promote the development of HUS. More information on *E. coli* O157:H7 can be found at www.health.state.mn.us.

The best way to prevent infections from contact with animals is to wash hands thoroughly with soap and water immediately afterwards. Hand sanitizers might afford some protection until hands can be washed with soap and water but do not work well against some germs or when hands are visibly soiled. Food, drinks, and items that promote hand-to-mouth contact (for example, pacifiers) should never be brought into animal areas.

-MDH-

NOTE TO EDITORS: MDH EPIDEMIOLOGISTS CARRIE KLUMB AND JONI SCHEFTEL WILL BE AVAILABLE FOR MEDIA INTERIVEWS AT THE ORVILLE FREEMAN BUIDING, 625 N. Robert Street, St. Paul, today between 9 a.m. and noon.

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Information on this website is available in alternative formats upon request.