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## Health Dept.: At Least 50 Fall Ill After Irish Picnic In McEwen

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**by Heather Graf**

**MCEWEN, Tenn.** – At least 50 people fell ill after a possible salmonella outbreak at the St. Patrick's Irish Picnic in McEwen.

The annual event, held July 27-28, usually brings in about 20,000 people and is a 158-year tradition in Humphreys County.

Officials with the State Department of Health said they started hearing about festival-goers getting sick just a few days after this year's picnic.

It's news that is hard for event organizers to hear.

"I'm just heartbroken that this many people have come down with this problem," said Michael Bradley, who's been involved with the picnic for more than two decades. "That's really a concern to us, and we're working with the health department to help them find out what the issue was."

Shelley Walker with the Health Department said a few of the reported cases have tested positive for *Salmonella enterica*.

At the same time, though, she said they are also interviewing others who attended the festival, but did not become sick.

They are testing various food items from the event, but have not identified the source of the illness.

Bradley wants people to know that his team works with the health department, even prior to the event, in hopes of avoiding incidents like this.

"They do an inspection on all the booths," he said. "We get permitted and scored on every booth, and every booth ranged from a 94 to a 96. Every year, we spend a good bit of money to get our booths up to grade, to make improvements on how we do food handling and food preparation."

This year, every booth was in compliance with state health standards.

Bradley said that's the most frustrating part - they still don't know what went wrong.

"One hundred and fifty eight years, this is the first year we've had any problems," he said. "We're proud of the support we get from the county and the community to put this event on, and to hear that our friends and people who attended may have gotten sick from this, it is a problem."

All proceeds from the picnic benefit St Patrick Catholic School in McEwen.

If you attended the event and have been feeling sick, health officials said you should see your doctor, right away.

Salmonella enterica often infects cattle and poultry, and can be harbored in raw eggs.

Health officials hope that the tests now being done will shed some light on the source of the illness, but said the reality is that that may never know exactly where it came from.

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