

# Pizza Ranch linked to E. coli outbreak in nine states

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Pizza Ranch restaurant in Sioux Falls, S.D.(Photo: Argus Leader file photo)

Pizza Ranch desserts have been linked to E. coli food poisonings in nine states, federal officials say.

The outbreak started in December, mainly among people who had eaten at the Iowa-based chain's restaurants, according to Brittany Behm, a spokeswoman for the federal Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. Behm said Wednesday that 13 people, including one Iowan, were sickened. Nine of the people said they recently had eaten at Pizza Ranches, she said. Two children, in Kansas and Nebraska, suffered kidney failure and had to be hospitalized. They have since recovered, Behm said. None of the patients died.

Pizza Ranch cooperated with the investigation, which wound up focusing on a dry dough mix used to make desserts, Behm said. No bacteria were found in remaining samples of the dough mix, but the outbreak ended after the company stopped using the mix and a similar product by early February, she said.

David Werning, a spokesman for the Iowa Department of Inspections and Appeals, said Iowa officials picked up samples from Pizza Ranch restaurants in Denison and Sergeant Bluff, then forwarded them to federal investigators. No E. coli bacteria were found in those samples, he said.

Behm said the illnesses happened in Illinois, Iowa, Kansas, Minnesota, North Carolina, Nebraska, New Jersey, South Dakota and Wisconsin. Minnesota, which had five cases, was the only state with more than one, she said.

The company is based in Orange City and has 190 restaurants in 13 states.

Pizza Ranch released a statement Wednesday morning from its Chief Administrative Officer Ryan Achterhoff:

“Since late January, we have been assisting public health officials who are investigating 13 cases of illness attributed to a specific strain of E. coli O157 bacteria. Nine of the affected individuals reported having eaten at nine different Pizza Ranches in seven states. There are also individuals multiple states away from the nearest Pizza Ranch that reported not eating at Pizza Ranch that have the same strain of E. coli O157, though health investigators have not been able to pinpoint how they contracted the strain. The most recent reported illness related to this outbreak reported eating at one of our locations on January 30, 2016. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention has told us that it believes the outbreak is concluded.

“We removed our Skillet Dough mix immediately from use in response to information suggesting that this product was a possible common factor in the illnesses and subsequently expanded this product withdrawal to include our Original Dough mix.

“The fact pattern shows that the source of bacteria originated from an outside supplier rather than at our restaurants. Several states collected products from Pizza Ranch restaurant locations to test for the presence of E.coli O157 though it was not found in any products tested. Pizza Ranch independently ran over 40 tests on different products to test for the presence of E. coli O157 and it was not found in any products tested. We provided public health investigators with a list of all of our ingredients as well as contact information for our ingredient suppliers. We also contacted the supplier of our dough mixes regarding this issue with the request that they cooperate with state and federal health officials.

“In addition, we instructed all Pizza Ranch locations to complete a special, precautionary cleaning of all surfaces and equipment used in dough preparation or service. Our franchisees and their team members responded with professionalism and great attention to detail. As a result, we continue to have absolute confidence in the quality and wholesomeness of every item we serve. All Pizza Ranch locations are open and serving their full menu.”

Dr. Patricia Quinlisk, medical director of the Iowa Department of Public Health, said the Iowa case involved an adult who did not require hospitalization. Quinlisk said state law would not allow her to comment on the business involved, but she said it is unusual for E. coli to be found in a dry baking mix. She noted that the bacteria generally are associated with meat or with leafy vegetables that have been fertilized with manure.

However, there have been E. coli outbreaks associated with other food items. For example, scores of people were sickened with the bacteria in 2009 in [an outbreak blamed on tainted Nestle Toll House cookie dough](#).

SOURCE: <https://www.desmoinesregister.com/story/news/health/2016/03/16/pizza-ranch-linked-e-coli-outbreak-nine-states/81858786/>