

Cantaloupes Connected to Statewide Salmonellosis Outbreak

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Public Advised to Avoid Eating Melons Grown in Southwestern Indiana

The Department for Public Health (DPH) today reported that cantaloupes tested in the state public health laboratory carry the same strain of Salmonella associated with a statewide outbreak that health officials say is still ongoing.

The salmonellosis outbreak, which has sickened at least 50 Kentuckians and been associated with two deaths, began in early July. Through an epidemiological investigation and confirmatory lab testing, Kentucky public health officials determined that cantaloupes, which evidence indicates were grown in southwestern Indiana but purchased in Kentucky, carried the same strain of Salmonella determined to be the cause of an ongoing outbreak of infection. Salmonellosis cases caused by the outbreak strain have also been reported in other states. In addition, investigation is also continuing into other clusters of salmonella cases in Kentucky, which may be linked to cantaloupe or watermelon consumption.

"Foodborne illness is a serious threat to public health. Consumers are advised to avoid eating cantaloupes from southwestern Indiana, especially if they are at heightened risk for complications from salmonella infection," said acting Public Health Commissioner Steve Davis, M.D. "In addition, healthcare providers are encouraged to be mindful of patients who may have symptoms consistent with salmonellosis and report all cases to the local health department."

The U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention is collaborating with public health officials in affected states and the U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA) to investigate the ongoing outbreak, including tracing the source of the affected melons and shipments of melons that may have been contaminated. A likely source of the outbreak is cantaloupes grown in southwestern Indiana region and distributed to stores in Kentucky. No Kentucky-grown cantaloupes have been associated with this outbreak.

Salmonella infections are relatively common, generally resulting in diarrhea, fever and abdominal cramps 12-72 hours after infection. Infection is most often diagnosed by culture of a stool sample. The illness usually lasts 4-7 days. Although most people recover without treatment, severe infections may occur, especially in young infants, the elderly and those with weakened immune systems.

Salmonella is a bacterium that can be found in the intestines of animals. Salmonellosis is often contracted from eating raw eggs or raw poultry or having those products touch other items that are then eaten (such as using the same cutting board for raw chicken and produce). Salmonella can also be found on the skin of reptiles and other animals. Handwashing should always be encouraged after playing with pets, especially in young children. Salmonella can occasionally be found on contaminated produce items, so all produce should be thoroughly washed and scrubbed before eating. In general, the FDA recommends thoroughly washing and scrubbing the rinds of all cantaloupes and melons prior to cutting and slicing, and to keep sliced melons refrigerated prior to eating.

If you believe you have experienced symptoms of salmonellosis, consult your healthcare provider. If you have a question, you may contact your local health department or the Kentucky department for Public Health's Food Safety Branch at (502) 564-7181.

More information about Salmonella can be found at <http://www.cdc.gov/salmonella>

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The Cabinet for Health and Family Services is home to most of the state's human services and health care programs, including Medicaid, the Department for Community Based Services and the Department for Public Health. CHFS is one of the largest agencies in state government, with nearly 8,000 full and part-time employees throughout the Commonwealth focused on improving the lives and health of Kentuckians.

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