

NEWS

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Montana investigating cases of listeria linked to cantaloupe

Department of the Public Health and Human Services officials have identified two cases of listeriosis in Montana residents who reside in two different Montana counties, Gallatin and Yellowstone.

Local and state health officials in Montana are investigating both cases for connections to a cluster of listeriosis cases in five other states that are possibly tied to consumption of cantaloupe. One case, in Yellowstone County, has been definitively linked to the outbreak and the other is awaiting further testing.

While the investigation is continuing to identify the exact source of the illness, the Centers for Disease Control (CDC) is recommending that persons at high risk for listeriosis, including older adults, persons with weakened immune systems, and pregnant women, do not eat cantaloupes coming from the Rocky Ford region of Colorado. At present, at least 17 ill persons in six states have been linked to the outbreak.

At this time, DPHHS is working with the U.S. Food and Drug Administration to determine distribution of the fruit in Montana. Until more is known regarding Montana's cases and the distribution of the product, health officials are recommending not consuming cantaloupe from the Rocky Ford region of Colorado.

"Contaminated cantaloupes may still be in grocery stores and in consumers' homes," said DPHHS Director Anna Whiting Sorrell. "There are simple steps Montanans can take to reduce the risk of becoming ill."

Listeriosis, a serious bacterial infection usually caused by eating contaminated food, is an important public health problem in the United States. The disease primarily affects older adults, pregnant women, newborns, and adults with weakened immune systems.

However, rarely, persons without these risk factors can also be affected. Symptoms of listeriosis include fever and muscle aches, and often include diarrhea, headache, stiff neck, confusion and

convulsions. Listeriosis also can cause miscarriages and stillbirths. Antibiotics given promptly can cure the illness and prevent infection of an unborn child. Even with prompt treatment, some Listeria infections result in death.

Listeriosis is usually associated with undercooked deli meats, refrigerated smoked seafood, and soft cheeses. The current multi-state outbreak appears to be related to consumption of cantaloupes produced in Colorado.

Advice from DPHHS includes:

- Persons at high risk for listeriosis, including older adults, persons with weakened immune systems, and pregnant women, should not eat cantaloupes coming from the Rocky Ford region of Colorado.
- Consumers who have cantaloupes in their homes can check the label or inquire at the store where they purchased it to determine if the fruit coming from the Rocky Ford region of Colorado.
- Persons who think they might have become ill from eating possibly contaminated cantaloupes should consult their doctor immediately.
- Cantaloupes coming from the Rocky Ford region should be disposed of in a closed plastic bag placed in a sealed trash can. This will prevent people or animals from eating them.
- Consumers and food preparers should wash their hands before and after handling any whole melon, such as cantaloupe, watermelon, or honeydew and wash and dry them with a clean cloth or paper towel before cutting.
- Cut melon should be promptly consumed or refrigerated at or less than 40 degrees F and discarded if left at room temperature for more than 4 hours.

As additional information on this outbreak becomes available local and state public health officials will issue updates as needed.

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