



Mono County Health and Human Services

Update on Foodborne Outbreaks

By: Dr. Richard Johnson, P.H.O.

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Spinach:

The U.S. Food and drug Administration has lifted the 2 week old warning on most fresh spinach, revising the alert to cover only specific brands packaged on certain dates. The decision is based on the determination that all the spinach implicated in the outbreak has either been eaten, destroyed, or recalled. Therefore, shoppers will begin to find packaged spinach back on the shelves immediately.

However, Dr. Rick Johnson, Mono County Health Officer, cautions that even though the source of this outbreak may be gone, the conditions that gave rise to the outbreak may persist. Until fundamental changes are put into place at farms and processing plants, there is a high probability that we will be having the same conversation in the future. The latest outbreak is the 20th such episode in the last 10 years involving leafy greens, mainly lettuce. Only the last 2 outbreaks have involved spinach. Eight of the 10 outbreaks have been traced to the Salinas Valley, the so-called "salad bowl" where 75% of the nations leafy green vegetables are grown. It is hoped that a coalition of growers, processors, and government agencies will be able to come up with a combination of voluntary guidelines and mandatory regulations that will protect the food supply.

As of 10 a.m. (PST) September 28, 2006, 187 persons infected with the outbreak strain of E. coli O157:H7 have been reported to the federal Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) from 26 states.

Among the ill persons, 97 were hospitalized and 29 developed a type of kidney failure called hemolytic-uremic syndrome (HUS), and one adult in Wisconsin has died.

The 26 affected states are: Arizona (7), California (2), Colorado (1), Connecticut (3) Idaho (4), Illinois (1), Indiana (9), Kentucky (8), Maine (3), Maryland (3), Michigan (4), Minnesota (2), Nebraska (9), Nevada (1), New Mexico (5), New York (11), Ohio (25), Oregon (6), Pennsylvania (9), Tennessee (1), Utah (17), Virginia (2), Washington (3), West Virginia (1), Wisconsin (49), and Wyoming (1).

Two illness associated with the outbreak have been confirmed in California, one case in Shasta County and one case in Riverside County.

E. coli O157 was isolated from nine packages of spinach supplied by patients living in seven states. All

packages were marketed as baby spinach and labeled with the same brand name. The "DNA fingerprints" of all nine of these E. coli match that of the outbreak strain.

The Pennsylvania Department of Health, the Utah Department of Health (UDOH), New Mexico Department of Health all have confirmed the same strain associated with the outbreak in bags of Dole baby spinach.

A total of five companies have initiated voluntary recalls: Triple B Corporation, doing business as S.T. Produce, of Seattle, Washington; Pacific Coast Fruit Company of Portland, Oregon; RLB Food Distributors, L.P., West Caldwell, NJ; River Ranch, of Salinas, California; and Natural Selection Foods, LLC, of San Juan Bautista, California.

At this time, the spinach implicated in the outbreak was grown in three California counties: Monterey, San Benito and Santa Clara. Spinach grown in the rest of the United States has not been implicated in the current E. coli O157:H7 outbreak. The FDA has stated that the public can be confident that spinach grown in the non-implicated areas can be consumed. Consumers are advised not to purchase or consume fresh spinach if they cannot verify that it was grown in areas other than the three California counties implicated in the outbreak. Frozen spinach, canned spinach and spinach included in pre-made meals manufactured by food companies are also not implicated in this outbreak.

CDHS is aggressively investigating this outbreak and coordinating our efforts with the U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA) and the Center for Disease Control (CDC). At this time the investigation includes nine ranches encompassing 12 fields. CDHS and FDA investigators are working to narrow the area implicated in the current E. coli O157:H7 outbreak even further and will complete investigations at all identified farms to try and determine the source of the contamination. During the investigation, the names of the farms are not public. They may not be the source of the contamination. If a farm is determined to be part of an investigation, that information will be provided when the investigation is complete.

E. coli O157:H7 infection often causes abdominal cramps and bloody diarrhea. A small percentage of infected individuals also develop hemolytic uremic syndrome, a condition in which red blood cells are destroyed and kidney failure may occur. There is usually little or no fever, and the illness typically resolves itself in five to 10 days. Those most at risk for serious complications of this food-borne illness include young children, the elderly and those with compromised immune systems. Consumers should seek immediate medical care if they develop these symptoms.

If individuals believe they may have experienced symptoms of illness after consuming fresh spinach or fresh spinach-containing products they should seek immediate medical advice.

Recall Information:

On September 22, 2006, Pacific Coast Fruit Company of Portland, Oregon initiated a voluntary recall of products that may include spinach supplied by Natural Selections Foods. Pacific Coast Fruit Company stopped making all products with spinach supplied from California on September 14, 2006. The recalled

products are: Baby Spring Mix Salad Kit (4.6 lbs), Chef on the Run- Bacon Spinach Salad (9 oz. plus 2 fl. oz. dressing), Chef on the Run - Spring Greens Salad (5 oz. plus 2 fl. oz. dressing), Chef on the Run - Willamette Valley Salad (10 oz. plus 2 fl. oz. dressing), Trader Joe's - Baby Spinach and Greens with Bleu Cheese, Candied Pecans and Cranberries with Raspberry Vinaigrette Dressing (10 oz.), Trader Joe's - Baby Greens and Spinach Salad with Wild Maine Blueberry Dressing (10 oz.), Mediterranean Veggie Blend Kit - 15 lbs, and My Brothers Pizza Spinach and Garlic - 15 oz. and 36 oz. Most of the salad products can be identified by the labels Trader Joe's, My Brothers Pizza or Chef on the Run and are in clam shell containers. Pizza products are in round cardboard bottoms with a plastic over wrap. All salad products will have a "USE BY DATE" on or before Sept 20, 2006. Pizza products will have a "USE BY DATE" on or before September 23, 2006. The products were distributed through various retail outlets in Alaska, Oregon, Washington and Idaho. There is no international distribution.

On September 22, 2006, Triple B Corporation, doing business as S.T. Produce, of Seattle, Washington, initiated a voluntary recall of its fresh spinach salad products with a "Use By" date of 8/22/2006 thru 9/20/2006. Spinach used in these products may have been supplied from Natural Selections Foods of California. The recalled products were distributed in Washington, Oregon, Idaho and Montana to retail stores and delis and sold in a hard plastic clamshell container. The products recalled by S.T. Produce are: NWG Spinach Salad (5 oz.), Spinach Salad, QFC (5 oz.), Charlie's Spinach Salad (5 oz.), Charlie's Tabouli & Goat Cheese Salad (10 oz.), NWG Tabouli & Goat Cheese Salad (10 oz.), Tabouli & Goat Cheese Salad, QFC (10 oz.), T/H Spring Mix Salad (5.5 oz.), T/H Mozzarella Spring Mix Salad (5.5 oz.), T/H Baby Spinach Salad (5.5 oz.), Walnut and Blue Cheese Salad w/ Grilled Chicken Breast (6.5 oz.), Larry's Market Tabouli & Goat Cheese Salad (10 oz.), Charlie's Seasonal Greens Salad (2.5 oz.), Charlie's Seasonal Greens Salad (4 oz.), Charlie's Baby Spinach Salad (6 oz.), Charlie's Baby Spinach Salad (5 oz.) and Caesar Bowtie Noodle Salad Kit with Grilled Chicken Breast (6.9 lbs).

On September 19, 2006, RLB Food Distributors, L.P., West Caldwell, NJ, initiated a voluntary recall of certain salad products that may contain spinach with an 'Enjoy Thru' date of 9/20/06. See: http://www.fda.gov/oc/po/firmrecalls/rlb09_06.html. The products recalled by RLB are: Balducci's Mesclun Mix 5 oz., Balducci's Organic Baby Spinach 5 oz., Balducci's Mixed Greens 5 oz., FreshPro Mesclun Mix 5 oz., FreshPro Organic Baby Spinach 5 oz., FreshPro Mixed Greens 5 oz., FreshPro Salad Mix with Italian Dressing 4.75 oz., and FreshPro Salad Mix with Ranch Dressing 5.25 oz.

On September 17, 2006, River Ranch, of Salinas, California, announced a voluntary recall of packages of spring mix containing spinach. River Ranch obtained bulk spring mix containing spinach from Natural Selections. The following brands are involved: Fresh N' Easy Spring Mix and Hy-Vee Spring mix containing baby spinach, distributed to retailers in Texas, Iowa, New Mexico, Georgia and Ohio. Product was packed in 5 oz. bags and 5 oz. plastic trays. Products that do not contain spinach are not part of this recall.

On September 15, 2006, Natural Selection Foods, LLC, of San Juan Bautista, California, announced a voluntary recall of all products containing spinach in all brands they pack with "Best if Used by Dates" of August 17, 2006 through October 1, 2006. These products include spinach and any salad with spinach in a blend, both retail and food service products. Products that do not contain spinach are not part of this recall. Natural Selection Foods, LLC brands include: Natural Selection Foods, Pride of San Juan, Earthbound

Farm, Bellissima, Dole, Rave Spinach, Emeril, Sysco, O Organic, Fresh Point, River Ranch, Superior, Nature's Basket, Pro-Mark, Compliments, Trader Joe's, Ready Pac, Jansal Valley, Cheney Brothers, D'Arrigo Brothers, Green Harvest, Mann, Mills Family Farm, Premium Fresh, Snoboy, The Farmer's Market, Tanimura & Antle, President's Choice, Cross Valley, and Riverside Farms. The affected products were also distributed to Canada, Mexico, Taiwan, Hong Kong and Iceland. No illnesses have been reported from these countries. FDA continues to investigate whether other companies and brands are involved.

Carrot Juice:

In response to a 4th case of botulism being linked to Bolthouse Farms, Bakersfield, California brand carrot juice, the FDA is warning consumers not to drink Bolthouse Farms Carrot juice, 450 ml and 1 liter plastic bottles, with "BEST IF USED BY" dates of 11 Nov 2006 or earlier. Consumers should discard this product. At present, there have been cases in Georgia and Florida. Since the actual distribution of the product is not known, it is likely that it has been distributed to other states including California as well, so the risk of cases of botulism appearing in other states is high.

Dr. Johnson also warns consumers to keep carrot juice - including pasteurized carrot juice - refrigerated. To date, one link between the illness and the consumers appears to be that the juice they drank was not properly refrigerated once it was in the home. This allows botulism spores to grow and produce toxin, which may cause severe illness, paralysis, and death.

Consumers should look for the words "Keep Refrigerated" on juice labels so that they know which products must be kept refrigerated.

Foodborne botulism is a rare, but potentially fatal illness characterized by blurred or double vision, droopy eyelids, difficulty with speech or swallowing, and progressive paralysis of the body that may cause breathing difficulty and death. Persons experiencing such symptoms should seek immediate medical attention.

Raw Milk:

California state officials continue the quarantine of raw, unpasteurized milk products produced by Organic Pastures of Fresno because 4 children have become ill after consuming them. They include two 8 year olds in San Diego, one 7 year old in Riverside County, and one 10 year old in San Bernardino County. At least 2 of the children remain hospitalized. The children have become infected with an E. coli bacteria, the same type as in the spinach outbreak. However, further testing has shown that this bacteria is not related to the bacteria found in the spinach. One of the children drank raw colostrum, a high-protein fluid secreted by the mother after the birth of her calf. The other 3 drank raw milk.

Internet and lay publications claim that raw milk will cure diverse ailments and prevent many more. Some say "the Lord gives us everything in its wholeness, and that's the way He meant us to keep it". They will continue to lobby for raw milk and its derivatives to be available as health foods.

However, I believe raw milk and raw milk products should be avoided, unless the consumer believes that the improved taste of the product warrants the risk. Warning labels should appear on all raw milk and raw milk products that clearly spell out the possible dangers, so the consumer can make an informed choice.



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