

News release

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Fresh strawberries from Washington County farm implicated in *E. coli* O157 outbreak in NW Oregon

PORTLAND, Ore.—Oregon Public Health officials have identified fresh strawberries from a Newberg farm as the source of a cluster of *Escherichia coli* O157:H7 infections that sickened at least 10 people last month, including one person who died.

The strawberries were produced last month by Jaquith Strawberry Farm located in Newberg. Jaquith finished its strawberry season in late July, and its strawberries are no longer on the market. Jaquith sold its strawberries to buyers who then resold them at roadside stands and farmers' markets.

Jaquith has recalled its products and is cooperating fully with the investigation.

Health officials are urging consumers who may have purchased strawberries grown on this farm to throw them out. Strawberries that have been frozen or made into uncooked jam are of particular concern. Cooking kills *E. coli* O157:H7 bacteria.

"If you have any strawberries from this producer — frozen, in uncooked jam or any uncooked form — throw them out," says Paul Cieslak, M.D., from Oregon Public Health Division. He says people who have eaten the strawberries, but remain well need take no action. The incubation period for *E. coli* O157:H7 is typically two to seven days.

None of the following have been implicated in this outbreak:

- Berries other than strawberries;
- Strawberries sold since Aug. 1;
- Strawberries sold south of Benton County or east of Multnomah County;
- Strawberries sold in supermarkets;

- Strawberries picked at Jaquith Strawberry Farm’s U-pick field.

Ten people have confirmed an *E. coli* O157:H7 infection caused by a single strain. These individuals include residents of Washington, Clatsop, and Multnomah counties. Six other people in northwest Oregon also have recently developed an *E. coli* O157:H7 infection and appear to be part of this outbreak.

Of the confirmed cases, four have been hospitalized, and one elderly woman in Washington County died from kidney failure associated with *E. coli* O157:H7 infection. There were 12 females and four males among the cases, and their ages ranged from 4 to 85. They fell ill between July 10 and July 29.

Cieslak, manager of the Oregon Public Health’s communicable disease section, said his team has been working with county public health officials and the Oregon Department of Agriculture on tracking the infection cases. When a potential outbreak is investigated, public health officials ask a slate of questions of those who have been sickened, family members and health care providers. The questions are to find common exposures and “trace back” to the source.

“If someone gets sick, we ask questions about everything from what they’ve eaten, to whether they’ve been to common gatherings, to whether they’ve been swimming in a particular place, and then out of this we try to find commonalities,” he said. “The commonality among these cases has been strawberries at roadside stands and farmers’ markets supplied by this one farm last month.”

E. coli is a common inhabitant of the gastrointestinal tract and is usually harmless. But *E. coli* O157:H7 is a strain of the bacterium carried by some animals, that can contaminate food and water, and that produces toxins that can cause mild to severe intestinal illness, including severe cramps and diarrhea that is often bloody. Some patients develop complications that require hospitalization. Approximately 5 percent of infected persons, especially young children and the elderly, suffer serious and potentially fatal kidney damage.

Antibiotics are not recommended for treatment of an *E. coli* O157:H7 infection, and they may actually make kidney failure more likely. People infected with *E. coli* O157 should rest and drink plenty of fluids to reduce fatigue and dehydration.

Public health officials emphasize that fruits and vegetables are still important to a healthy diet; at least five servings per day are recommended. However, people need to take the following precautions with any uncooked produce:

1. Wash fruits and vegetables thoroughly before eating them.
2. Keep fruits and vegetables and other raw food separated from cooked food.
3. Wash your hands thoroughly with soap after handling raw foods, as well as before eating, after using the toilet, and after changing diapers.

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