

News release

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***Salmonella* outbreak a serious reminder to properly handle, cook poultry**

Oregon Public Health officials say four steps can prevent Salmonella infection

A rise in *Salmonella* illnesses in 2012 linked to chicken in Oregon and Washington State is a reminder that all poultry products carry the risk of contamination, but proper handling and preparation of chicken will help people avoid illness.

In 2012, Oregon saw 56 cases of *Salmonella* Heidelberg infection, which is a marked increase over previous years. All people reportedly have recovered from their illnesses; there have been no deaths associated with the outbreak. During 2007 – 2011, an average of 27 cases were reported in our state annually.

“The 2012 salmonellosis outbreak is a wake-up call,” says Paul Cieslak, M.D., of the Oregon Public Health Division. “While these outbreaks are unfortunate, they’re also preventable if people take the proper steps when storing, handling and preparing raw poultry products.”

Salmonellosis, a common foodborne illness, is an infection with *Salmonella* bacteria, which can cause diarrhea, fever and abdominal cramps. But salmonellosis can be avoided by handling chicken with care and cooking it to the right temperature.

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In 2012, 43 of the 56 confirmed human cases of infection by *Salmonella* Heidelberg bacteria in Oregon were caused by a particular strain linked to chicken processed by Foster Farms, according to patient reports and laboratory testing of randomly purchased chicken. There has been no recall issued.

“Chicken is safe when it’s prepared and cooked correctly,” Cieslak says. “Although these cases are linked to a specific brand, there is also some risk of salmonellosis from uncooked poultry products of any brand. Poultry is routinely contaminated with *Salmonella* and other illness-causing bacteria. If people clean, separate, cook and chill poultry properly, they can avoid illness.”

To keep food safe from harmful bacteria:

1. **Clean.** People should wash their hands thoroughly before and after handling meat. Clean all food preparation surfaces, cooking utensils and cookware after they come in contact with raw poultry.
2. **Separate.** When handling poultry, keep it and its juices away from ready-to-eat foods. Use one cutting board for fresh produce and a separate one for raw meat, poultry and seafood.
3. **Cook.** Always cook poultry to an internal temperature of 165 degrees Fahrenheit as measured with a food thermometer. Check the internal temperature in the innermost part of the thigh and wing and the thickest part of the breast.
4. **Chill.** Uncooked poultry should be refrigerated no longer than two days and kept in the freezer no more than four months. Cooked poultry can be refrigerated for three to four days and frozen for two to three months.

OHA’s Public Health Division is working with Washington State Department of Health and the U.S. Centers for the Disease Control and Prevention to track cases of salmonellosis and to promote food safety.

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Symptoms usually develop within one to five days of exposure to the contaminated product. Some people with salmonellosis develop serious illness that can lead to hospitalization and even death, Cieslak says, although most people who get the infection have milder symptoms that resolve on their own.

More information:

- Oregon Public Health's food safety information page: <http://public.health.oregon.gov/HEALTHYENVIRONMENTS/FOODSAFETY/Pages/tips.aspx>
- OPHD's county-by-county salmonellosis illness data <http://public.health.oregon.gov/DiseasesConditions/DiseasesAZ/salmonellosis/Documents/salmonella-h-outbreak2012.pdf>
- Washington State Public Health: <http://www.doh.wa.gov/>
- USDA Food Safety and Inspection Service's poultry preparation tips: www.fsis.usda.gov/Fact_Sheets/Chicken_from_Farm_to_Table/index.asp#12
- CDC's food safety website: www.cdc.gov/foodsafety/

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