

UNCLAS

SUBJECT: DoD Advisory Notice - Romaine Lettuce Originating from Salinas, California Growing Region

**THIS IS AN ADVISORY ONLY AND NOT A RECALL.**

Date Issued: 25 November 2019

FDA, CDC, and state health authorities are investigating an outbreak of illnesses caused by *E. coli* O157:H7 in the United States. Epidemiologic, laboratory, and traceback evidence indicates that romaine lettuce from the Salinas, California growing region is a likely source of this outbreak.

According to the CDC, as of November 21, 2019, 40 people infected with the outbreak strain of *E. coli* O157:H7 have been reported from 16 states. The case patients report that illnesses started on dates ranging from September 24, 2019 to November 10, 2019.

The Maryland Department of Health identified *E. coli* O157:H7 in an unopened package of Ready Pac Bistro® Chicken Caesar Salad collected from an ill person's home in Maryland. Analysis of this salad, through Whole Genome Sequencing (WGS), has linked strain *E. coli* O157:H7 to three Maryland cases and the multi-state outbreak.

The FDA and state partners are conducting a traceback investigation to trace romaine exposures to the source. Preliminary information indicates that ill people in Maryland were exposed to romaine lettuce harvested in Salinas, California.

FDA is deploying investigators to the farms in question to determine the source and extent of the contamination. More information will be forthcoming as the investigation proceeds.

Additionally, state partners are conducting laboratory analyses of romaine lettuce samples from case patients potentially linked to the outbreak.

**Consumers:** Consumers should not eat romaine lettuce harvested from Salinas, California.

Romaine lettuce may be voluntarily labeled with a harvest region. If romaine lettuce has "Salinas" on the label in any form (whether alone or with the name of another location) do not eat it. Throw it away or return it to the place of purchase. If romaine lettuce does not have information about harvest region or does not indicate that it has been grown indoors (i.e., hydroponically- and greenhouse-grown), throw it away or return it to the place of purchase. Consumers ordering salad containing romaine at a restaurant or at a salad bar should ask the staff whether the romaine came from Salinas. If it did, or they do not know, do not eat it.

At this time, romaine lettuce that was harvested outside of the Salinas region has not been implicated in this outbreak investigation. Hydroponically- and greenhouse-grown romaine, which is voluntarily labeled as "indoor grown," from any region does not appear to be related to the current

outbreak. There is no recommendation for consumers to avoid using romaine harvested from these other sources.

**Restaurants and Retailers:** Restaurants and retailers should not serve or sell romaine harvested from Salinas, California. If you do not know the source of your romaine lettuce, and if you cannot obtain that information from your supplier, you should not serve, nor sell it.

**Suppliers and Distributors:** Suppliers, distributors and others in the supply chain should not ship or sell romaine harvested in Salinas, California. If the source of the romaine lettuce is unknown, you should not ship, nor sell the product.

**For Restaurants, Retailers, Suppliers and Distributors:** Currently, the FDA does not have enough traceback information to identify the specific source of the contamination that would allow us to request a targeted recall from specific growers. At this stage in the investigation, the most efficient way to ensure that contaminated romaine is off the market would be for industry to voluntarily withdraw product grown in Salinas, and to withhold distribution of Salinas romaine for the remainder of the growing season in Salinas. FDA has made this request of industry.

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#### **What is *E. coli*?**

*E. coli* are mostly harmless bacteria that live in the intestines of people and animals and contribute to intestinal health. However, eating or drinking food or water contaminated with certain types of *E. coli* can cause mild to severe gastrointestinal illness. Some types of pathogenic (illness-causing) *E. coli*, such as Shiga toxin-producing *E. coli* (STEC), can be life-threatening.

People infected with pathogenic *E. coli* can start to notice symptoms anywhere from a few days after consuming contaminated food or as much as nine days later. Generally, the symptoms include severe stomach cramps, diarrhea, fever, nausea, and/or vomiting.

The severity or presence of certain symptoms may depend on the type of pathogenic *E. coli* causing the infection. Some infections can cause severe bloody diarrhea and lead to life-threatening conditions, such as a type of kidney failure called hemolytic uremic syndrome (HUS), or the development of high blood pressure, chronic kidney disease, and neurologic problems. Other infections may have no symptoms or may resolve without medical treatment within five to seven days.

Due to the range in severity of illness, people should consult their health care provider if they suspect that they have developed symptoms that resemble an *E. coli* infection, including HUS, but even healthy older children and young adults can become seriously ill.

People of any age can become infected with pathogenic *E. coli*. Children under the age of 5 years, adults older than 65, and people with weakened immune systems are more likely to develop severe illness as a result of an *E. coli* infection. However, even healthy older children and young adults can become seriously ill.

**General Food Safety Tips for Retailers:** Restaurants and retailers should always practice safe food handling and preparation measures. It is recommended that employees wash hands, utensils, and surfaces with hot, soapy water before and after handling food.

- Regular frequent cleaning and sanitizing of food contact surfaces and utensils used in food preparation may help to minimize the likelihood of cross-contamination.
- Wash and sanitize display cases and refrigerators regularly.
- Wash and sanitize cutting boards, surfaces, and utensils used to prepare, serve, or store food.
- Wash hands with hot water and soap following the cleaning and sanitation process.

**General Food Safety Tips for Consumers:** People should consult their healthcare provider if they suspect that they have developed symptoms that resemble an *E. coli* infection. Consumers should follow these steps for preventing foodborne illness:

- Wash the inside walls and shelves of the refrigerator, cutting boards and countertops, and utensils that may have contacted contaminated foods; then sanitize them with a solution of one tablespoon of chlorine bleach to one gallon of hot water; dry with a clean cloth or paper towel that has not been previously used.
- Wash and sanitize surfaces used to serve or store potentially contaminated products.
- Wash hands with warm water and soap following the cleaning and sanitation process.

Additional Information on this outbreak can be found on the following website:

CDC: <https://www.cdc.gov/ecoli/2018/o157h7-04-18/index.html>

FDA: <https://www.fda.gov/Food/RecallsOutbreaksEmergencies/Outbreaks/ucm604254.htm>

The Point of Contact for this advisory message is the undersigned at email: [dscpconssafofc@dla.mil](mailto:dscpconssafofc@dla.mil).



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