



# Delaware General Health District HEALTH ALERT

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## Outbreak of E.coli O157:H7 Infections Linked to Romaine Lettuce

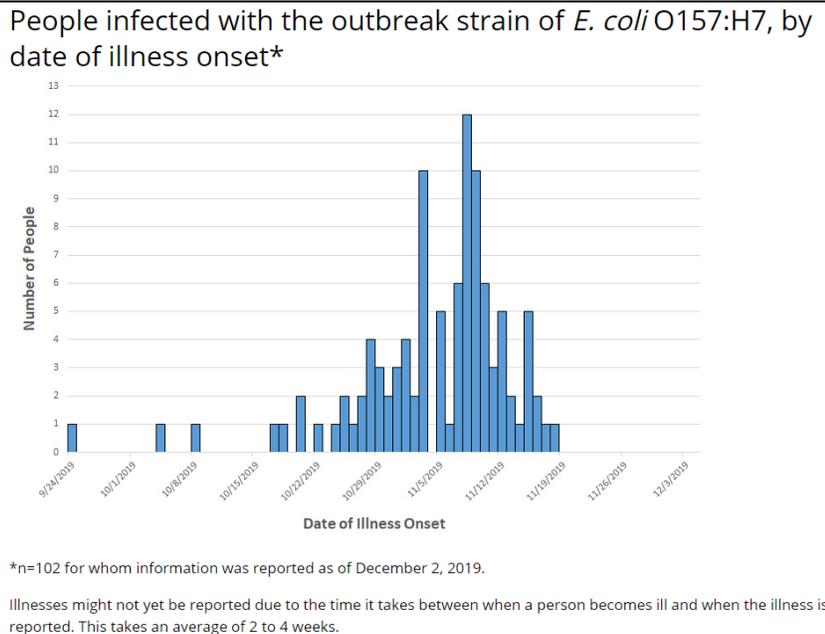
### Summary

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), public health and regulatory officials in several states, and the US Food and Drug Administration (FDA) are investigating a multistate outbreak of E. coli O157:H7 infections linked to romaine lettuce harvested from the Salinas, California, growing region.

A total of 102 people infected with the outbreak strain of *E. coli* O157:H7 have been reported from 23 states. A total of 58 hospitalizations have been reported. Ten people have developed hemolytic uremic syndrome, a type of kidney failure. No deaths have been reported. As of December 4<sup>th</sup>, Ohio has 12 cases with 1 confirmed case in Delaware County.

No common grower, supplier, distributor, or brand of romaine lettuce has been identified. The investigation is ongoing to determine the source of contamination and if additional products are linked to illness. This outbreak is caused by the same strain of *E. coli* O157:H7 that caused outbreaks linked to leafy greens in 2017 and to romaine lettuce in 2018.

At A Glance:	
Reported Cases:	102
States:	23
Hospitalizations:	58
Cases with HUS:	10
Deaths:	0
Recall:	Yes



### Background

*Escherichia coli* O157:H7 (*E. coli* O157) is one of hundreds of strains of the bacterium *Escherichia coli*. Most strains of *E. coli* are harmless and live in the intestines of healthy humans and animals. However, the O157 strain produces a powerful toxin that can cause severe illness. Symptoms of Shiga toxin-producing *E. coli* (STEC) infection vary for each

person, but often include severe stomach cramps, diarrhea (often bloody), and vomiting. Some people may have a fever, which usually is not very high (less than 101°F/38.5°C). Most people with a STEC infection start feeling sick 3 to 4 days after eating or drinking something that contains the bacteria. However, illnesses can start anywhere from 1 to 10 days after exposure. Most people get better within 5 to 7 days. Some infections are very mild, but others are severe or even life-threatening.

About 5-10% of people who are diagnosed with STEC infection develop a potentially life-threatening complication known as hemolytic uremic syndrome (HUS). HUS develops about 7 days after symptoms first appear, when diarrhea is improving. Symptoms of HUS may include decreased frequency of urination, feeling very tired, and losing pink color in cheeks and inside the lower eyelids.

## **Recommendations**

### Clinical Recommendations

- Complete laboratory testing on individuals with symptoms of *E. coli*, especially if they report eating recalled product.
- People with HUS should be hospitalized because their kidneys may stop working and they may develop other serious problems.
- Antibiotics are not helpful for treating *E. coli* O157 infections and may even increase the likelihood of developing HUS. Antidiarrheal agents should not be used either.

### Other Recommendations

- Consumers should not eat and retailers should not sell any romaine lettuce grown in the Salinas, California, growing region. This includes all use-by dates and brands of romaine lettuce from this region. This advice includes all types of romaine lettuce grown in Salinas, California, such as whole heads of romaine, organic romaine, hearts of romaine, romaine in salad wraps, and packages of precut lettuce and salad mixes which contain romaine, including baby romaine, spring mix, and Caesar salad.
- If you have romaine lettuce or packaged foods containing romaine at home, check the label. If the label says “grown in Salinas” or if it isn’t labeled, do not eat and throw it away. Wash and sanitize drawers or shelves in refrigerators where romaine lettuce was stored.
  - If the patient is diagnosed with *E. coli* and has leftover product, the product may be given to the DGHD for testing.
- The FDA recommends rinsing fresh fruits and vegetables under running tap water, however, washing does not ensure removal of all pathogens.
- Ohio Administrative Code (OAC) 3701-3-13 (J) states: a person with *Escherichia coli* (*E. coli*) O157:H7, other enterohemorrhagic (Shiga toxin-producing) *E. coli* or hemolytic uremic syndrome (HUS) who attends a child care center or works in a sensitive occupation shall be excluded from the child care center or work in the sensitive occupation and may return after his or her diarrhea has ceased and after two consecutive follow-up stool specimens are negative for *E. coli* O157:H7 or other enterohemorrhagic (Shiga toxin producing) *E. coli*.”
- People with higher chances for foodborne illness are pregnant women, newborns, children, older adults, and those with weak immune systems, such as people with cancer, diabetes, or HIV/AIDS.

## **Reporting**

Shiga toxin-producing enterohemorrhagic *E. coli* (STEC) is a class B reportable disease in Ohio, meaning cases are required to be reported by the next business day. Please report all cases to the Delaware General Health District (DGHD) by calling (740) 203-2039 or fax reports to our secure fax line- (740) 203- 2044.

## **For More Information**

CDC Outbreak Information: <https://www.cdc.gov/ecoli/2019/o157h7-11-19/index.html>

The products subject to the recall can be found on the USDA website at: <https://www.fsis.usda.gov>