



Flathead City-County Health Department

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E. coli O157 Outbreak Investigation

The Flathead City-County Health Department (FCCHD), the Montana Department of Public Health and Human Services (DPHHS), and other local health departments, are working together to investigate an *E. coli* O157:H7 outbreak originating in Flathead County.

To date, the investigation has identified at least 13 individuals associated with the outbreak. Many of the cases experienced moderate to severe symptoms, and one death has occurred. Preliminary investigative findings indicate that ground beef containing the *E. coli* bacteria may be the exposure of concern. State partners continue to test clinical and food samples for laboratory confirmation.

The FCCHD and DPHHS investigation has determined that the ground beef identified as the potential source of the outbreak was sold directly to several restaurants from a distributor. The product was not available for purchase by consumers in grocery store settings. Public health staff worked directly with all affected facilities to remove any remaining product. The last known date of consumption of the product was July 14th, 2024.

“We send our condolences to all family and friends that have been affected by this death,” said Jennifer Rankosky, Health Officer of the Flathead City-County Health Department. “Our staff continue to work diligently through this investigation and were able to identify a suspect source early to mitigate risks and prevent others from getting sick.”

E. coli O157 infections can be caused by a person eating a product that is contaminated with this strain of bacteria. Symptoms of *E. coli* infection include severe stomach cramps, bloody diarrhea, vomiting, fever, and chills. In severe cases, the infection can also damage organs. Symptoms of *E. coli* infection occur between one and ten days after exposure, with an average of three to four days after exposure. Individuals that may be experiencing these symptoms are encouraged to contact their healthcare provider.

E. coli infections can be prevented by taking the following precautions:

- Cook ground beef and pork to a minimum internal temperature of 160°F. Do not eat rare or undercooked ground beef.
- Always carefully wash hands with soap and warm water after using the bathroom and changing diapers, and before handling or eating any food.
- Always wash hands after contact with farm animals, animal feces, and animal environments.
- Wash raw fruits and vegetables before eating.
- Keep raw meat separate from produce and other foods when shopping for and storing groceries.
- Avoid unpasteurized beverages.

FCCHD encourages individuals to take precautionary measures to prevent foodborne illness. For more information about *E. coli* and illness prevention tips, visit <https://www.cdc.gov/ecoli/about/index.html>.



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