

Oregon salmonellosis outbreak traced to cantaloupe

by Bend_Weekly_News_Sources

Consumers are being urged to discard certain brands of fresh cantaloupe in the wake of a salmonellosis outbreak investigation, Oregon public health officials announced. The implicated products were grown in Honduras and grown or packed by "Agropecuaria Montelibano," also known as "Agrolibano." Agropecuaria Montelibano is a major supplier of cantaloupe to the United States. The cantaloupe were identified as the source of an outbreak of *Salmonella* Litchfield, a rare strain of the disease, which affected consumers in the United States and Canada since the middle of January. More than 50 cases have been confirmed in at least 16 states, including five in Oregon and nine in Washington. "If you have any of this kind of cantaloupe at home, we recommend that you throw it out," Dr. William E. Keene, an epidemiologist at the Oregon Public Health Division. "If your cantaloupe has a sticker that says Guatemala or some other country, then it is not associated with this outbreak. If you can't tell where it came from, or if it came from Honduras, you could check with the store to see if it might be from this company." Agrolibano distributes under many different label names. "It is confusing, but unfortunately there isn't any magic wand we can wave to tell which cantaloupe came from which field," he said. "If you're concerned about fruit that you have at home, the simplest thing to do is just toss it." The U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA) is working with the growers and packers involved to try to pinpoint the source of contamination, but that investigation may take months. "In our state only five cases have been confirmed so far," Keene said. "But we estimate that for every confirmed case, there are 25 or more other people who became ill." At least one person was hospitalized, but all have recovered from their illness. Over the years, cantaloupe and other melons have been identified as the source of several salmonellosis outbreaks in the United States. "Cantaloupe and other melons are tasty and nutritious, and we don't want people to stop eating them," Keene said. The most important advice for consumers is to promptly refrigerate or eat cut melons. "Once you cut into a melon, go ahead and eat it right away or else stick it into the refrigerator," Keene said. "Bacteria will start to multiply on the flesh of the melon if you leave it out." *Salmonella* infections can cause diarrhea, fever, abdominal cramping, and sometimes vomiting. Symptoms typically last less than a week, but some people, particularly infants, the elderly, and those with immunodeficiencies are at increased risk for severe illness. Antibiotic therapy is of no value for most patients, and can lead to prolonged excretion of the organism, increasing the risk of person-to-person spread. *Salmonella* bacteria are widely distributed among animals and in the environment. Poultry is often contaminated, and other outbreaks have been traced to produce, meat, unpasteurized milk, and cheese made with raw milk. *Salmonella* in food can be killed by thorough cooking, but it can survive undercooking or uneven cooking, as may happen in some microwave ovens.

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