

Officials warn of E. coli outbreak linked to ground beef

by Bend_Weekly_News_Sources

Consumers need to dispose of a brand of extra lean ground beef linked to at least eight Escherichia coli O157:H7 infections cases in Oregon and Washington, public health officials announced today.

The products were sold in Northwest grocery stores in late July and early August. Both products were packaged in 16-ounce black trays and labeled as follows: "Northwest Finest" brand Natural Ground Beef, 7% fat. The red and black label bears a UPC code of "7 52907 60012 7." "Northwest Finest" brand Organic Ground Beef, 10% fat." The green and black label has no UPC code.

Each package also bears the establishment number "Est. 965" inside the USDA mark of inspection as well as a sell-by date between August 1 and August 11 2007. An alert was issued earlier today by the federal Food Safety and Inspection Service.

The organic product was sold at QFC, Fred Meyer, and Safeway stores in Oregon, Washington, Idaho, and Alaska. The natural product was sold at Safeway stores in Oregon, Washington and possible elsewhere. The meat was ground by Interstate Meat Dist., Inc. in Clackamas, Oregon.

"The first eight confirmed cases were in six households, one in Oregon and five in Washington, said Dr. William E. Keene, senior epidemiologist at the Oregon Public Health Division's communicable disease section. "Our investigation revealed that these households had purchased ground beef from the same source at grocery stores in Oregon and Washington."

Several other household members later became ill through what may have been person-to-person spread, Dr. Keene said. Two of the Washington cases were hospitalized. Both have recovered.

"If you have any low-fat hamburger in your freezer, check the label for the brand name and the SELL BY

date. If it meets the description, be safe and throw it out," said Dr. Keene.

E. coli O157 can cause mild to severe intestinal illness, including severe cramps and diarrhea that is often bloody. Some patients develop complications that require hospitalization. A few patients, especially young children and the elderly, may suffer serious and potentially fatal kidney damage.

"With the Labor Day weekend ahead of us, this is a timely reminder that uncooked meat and poultry should always be handled with caution," said Dr. Keene. "Meat may be safer than it used to be, but it is still always prudent to assume that uncooked meat and poultry are contaminated and to handle them accordingly."

To avoid illness for you and your family, follow these rules:

1. Keep raw food separated from cooked food. For example, don't take the burgers off the grill and put them back on the same plate that the raw meat was on. Use a separate, clean plate.

2. Clean any utensils and surfaces that touch raw meat thoroughly before using them again.

3. Store and defrost meat in a way that prevents meat juice from dripping onto other foods or surfaces, including refrigerator shelves and countertops. Refrigerate raw meat packages in a pan to avoid drips.

4. Wash your hands thoroughly with soap after handling raw meat, as well as before eating, after using the toilet, and after changing diapers.

5. Cook ground beef thoroughly. It's best to use a thermometer. Make sure that the inside temperature gets up to at least 160°F. If you don't have a thermometer, get one -- and use it. In the meantime, at least make sure that none of the meat is still pink and that the juices run clear.

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