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SECRETARY

JOHN AUERBACH
COMMISSIONER

The Commonwealth of Massachusetts
Executive Office of Health and Human Services
Department of Public Health
Bureau of Environmental Health
Food Protection Program
305 South Street, Jamaica Plain, MA 02130-3597
617-983-6712 617-983-6770 - Fax

Contact:

Donna Rheaume
617-624-5006

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Public Health Advisory: Massachusetts Health Officials Investigating E.Coli Cases

Same strain of bacteria has been found in patients from several states. Source has not been identified, but illnesses may be linked to consumption of beef products.

BOSTON — The Massachusetts Department of Public Health (DPH) is investigating six cases of *E. coli* O157:H7 in Massachusetts residents that appear to be caused by the same strain of the bacteria found in patients from several other states.

A source of contamination has not been identified; however the cluster of illnesses may be linked to the consumption of beef products. State health officials, along with investigators from USDA, worked through the weekend to try and identify a possible source of contamination. The investigation is focused on ground beef, and testing of samples collected from several stores will be conducted this week.

Based on the preliminary findings, DPH is reminding the public to consume only fully cooked ground beef. Cooking meat to an internal temperature of 160 degrees Fahrenheit kills the bacteria.

E. coli O157:H7 is a type of bacteria that can cause bloody diarrhea, dehydration, and in the most severe cases, kidney failure. The very young, the elderly and persons with weakened immune systems are the most susceptible to foodborne illness.

The Massachusetts cases range in age from three to 60 years. They include residents of Middlesex, Suffolk and Essex counties. They reported becoming ill between July 10th and 16th. At least five of the cases were hospitalized. These cases may be linked to 20 other cases in several states and Quebec that were caused by the same strain of *E. coli*.

The Massachusetts cases were linked by DNA testing and by comparing those results to results from others around the country through a federal foodborne illness surveillance program called PulseNet.

Breakdown of Mass. Cases

Source County	Age	Sex	Onset
ESSEX	3	MALE	7/10/2008
MIDDLESEX	29	FEMALE	7/16/2008
MIDDLESEX	59	FEMALE	7/12/2008
MIDDLESEX	60	FEMALE	TBD
SUFFOLK	13	MALE	7/11/2008
SUFFOLK	19	MALE	7/13/2008

Anyone with signs or symptoms of foodborne illness should consult their health care provider, local board of health, the DPH Epidemiology Program at 617-983-6800 or the Food Protection Program at 617-983-6712.

This advisory will be updated as new information becomes available.

Resources on the Web: Go to www.mass.gov/dph for link to Fact Sheet

- [Fact Sheet on *E.coli* O157:H7](#)

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