

For immediate release:
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Department of Health Announces Link Between Tomatoes, Salmonella

(Santa Fe) -- The New Mexico Department of Health announced today that an outbreak of Salmonella is likely caused by eating uncooked tomatoes. So far, 31 people from seven counties in New Mexico have been sick with a strain of Salmonella called Salmonella St. Paul. Several people have been hospitalized, and no one has died.

The Department of Health's epidemiologists, Public Health staff and the Scientific Laboratory worked together to interview patients, test samples and conclude that uncooked tomatoes are the likely cause of the outbreak.

New Mexico has been coordinating the investigation between other states, New Mexico Environment Department, the Navajo Nation, Indian Health Service, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention and the Food and Drug Administration. FDA is trying to pinpoint the exact source of the implicated tomatoes.

"We have determined that eating uncooked tomatoes is the likely source of this outbreak, and we hope to provide more specific information about the type of tomatoes as the investigation proceeds," said Health Secretary Dr. Alfredo Vigil.

Until further information is available, the Department of Health recommends the following:

- Individuals and restaurants that bought tomatoes from Walmart in Las Cruces or Farmington, Lowe's in Las Cruces, or Bashas' in Crownpoint since May 3 should not eat them uncooked.
- Always wash tomatoes before eating.
- Wash hands, kitchen work surfaces and utensils with soap and water immediately after they have been in contact with tomatoes.
- Cook food thoroughly to kill Salmonella.

People began to be sick on May 6. The Department of Health continues to identify new infections.

Most people infected with Salmonella develop diarrhea, fever, and abdominal cramps 12 to 72 hours after infection. The illness usually lasts four to seven days, and most persons recover without treatment. Some people may need hospitalization due to severe diarrhea. The elderly, infants, and those with impaired immune systems are more likely to have a severe illness.

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