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Agency had 'strong hunch' about Bil Mar

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Abstract (Document Summary)

But Dr. Paul Mead, a CDC epidemiologist leading the investigation into the outbreak, said he and his agency didn't recommend a recall until Dec. 22 -- eight days later. By that time, the listeria outbreak, which began in August, had led to three deaths, one miscarriage and more than 30 illnesses in nine states.

The CDC recall recommendation came several days after an epidemiologist from the Minnesota Health Department urged a Bil Mar recall, Mead said. At the same time, the U.S. Department of Agriculture, which regulates meat processing plants, didn't recommend such a measure, Mead said.

The latest person to fall ill came down with symptoms on Dec. 27, but because the bacteria has such a long incubation period, the illness may have been caused by Bil Mar products eaten more than a month earlier, Mead said. The most recent death -- a 43-year-old man with a weakened immune system -- was recorded in Arizona in January, according to health officials there.

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