

## **Environment Department Asks Restaurants, Hospitals, Schools, Grocery Stores to Stop Serving and Selling Certain Raw Tomatoes Linked to Salmonellosis**

*Residents Are Advised not to Eat certain Tomatoes or Foods that Contain the Produce at Home or in Restaurants, Schools, Hospitals*

The New Mexico Environment Department asks managers of restaurants, hospitals, supermarkets, schools and other food establishments that serve or sell raw red plum, red Roma, or round red tomatoes or products like fresh salsas and *pico de gallo* made with those tomatoes to stop serving or selling them because of a an outbreak of salmonellosis linked to that produce.

Cherry tomatoes, grape tomatoes, tomatoes with the vine still attached and homegrown tomatoes are not suspected to be linked to the outbreak and the U.S. Food and Drug Administration advised that those foods may be substituted for the other produce (Visit <http://www.fda.gov/bbs/topics/NEWS/2008/NEW01843.html> ).

The department has been working with other agencies in the state, including the state Department of Health, Bernalillo County, the City of Albuquerque and Indian Health Services, in alerting residents of the bacteria Salmonella serotype Saintpaul that is causing illnesses around the country.

“The department’s Food Program Bureau is contacting distributors of tomatoes to ensure they notify food establishments to stop serving tomatoes suspected in making people sick,” said New Mexico Environment Department Secretary Ron Curry. “We are also working with the New Mexico Restaurant Association to alert restaurants of the urgency to stop serving the implicated tomatoes.”

State and federal health authorities are investigating the specific type and source of tomatoes causing the outbreak. However, preliminary data suggests raw red plum, red Roma, or round red tomatoes are the cause.

The department also reminds managers of food establishments that employees who are experiencing symptoms of gastrointestinal illness should not be allowed to handle food. In addition, workers in the food industry should wash their hands frequently.

- People with increased risk of severe infection, including infants, the elderly and those with impaired immune systems -- or those who want to reduce their risk of Salmonella infection -- should not eat raw Roma, plum, or red round tomatoes but can substitute them with cherry tomatoes, grape tomatoes, tomatoes sold with the vine still attached and homegrown tomatoes
- Residents should wash cherry tomatoes, grape tomatoes, tomatoes sold with the vine still attached and homegrown tomatoes thoroughly under running water before eating them.

- Those tomatoes should also be refrigerated within two hours of purchasing them. Cut, peeled, or cooked tomatoes that have not been refrigerated within that amount of time should be discarded.
- Residents should keep raw tomatoes separate from raw meats, raw seafood and other raw produce.
- Residents should wash cutting boards, dishes, utensils, and counter tops with hot water and soap when switching between types of food products.

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

Consumers in New Mexico who have recently eaten raw tomatoes or foods containing raw tomatoes and are experiencing any of these symptoms should contact their health care provider. All *Salmonella* infections should be reported to state or local health authorities.

There have been 48 reported cases, including 12 hospitalizations, of salmonellosis caused by *Salmonella* Saintpaul in New Mexico from May 11 to May 30. Reports of illness in Texas, Arizona, Colorado, Idaho, Illinois, Indiana, Kansas, and Utah are being investigated to determine whether they are also linked to the consumption of tomatoes. No deaths related to the outbreak have been reported. There are no reported deaths.

For more information, call Marissa Stone at (505) 827-0314.

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