

## News release

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**Media Contact:** Christine Stone, 971-673-1282 desk; 503-602-8027 cell;  
christine.l.stone@state.or.us.

### **Lab tests confirm source of *E. coli* O157 from deer droppings in strawberry fields in NW Oregon**

PORTLAND, Ore.- Oregon Public Health Division officials confirmed today that deer feces found in strawberry fields in Washington and Yamhill counties was the source of *E. coli* O157:H7 infections that sickened at least 15 people in July, including one person who died.

“An Oregon Public Health Communicable Disease team has been investigating the outbreak for several weeks,” said Katrina Hedberg, M.D., M.P.H., Oregon Public Health state epidemiologist. “There were six samples that positively matched the *E. coli* that was found in the people who were infected.”

Strawberries from the affected fields were produced last month by Jaquith Strawberry Farm, which is located in Newberg. At this time, the Oregon Department of Agriculture believes it has identified those operators and locations that possibly sold Jaquith strawberries.

Jaquith finished its strawberry season in late July, and its strawberries are no longer on the market. Jaquith sold its strawberries to buyers who then resold them at roadside stands, farm stands and farmers' markets. Jaquith has recalled its products and is cooperating fully with the investigation.

Health officials continue to urge people who purchased strawberries grown on this farm to throw them out. Strawberries that have been frozen or made into uncooked jam are of particular concern. Cooking kills *E. coli* O157:H7 bacteria.

“If you have any strawberries from this producer – frozen, in uncooked jam or any uncooked form – throw them out. People who have eaten the strawberries but

(more)

remain well need take no action,” said Hedberg. The incubation period for *E. coli* O157:H7 is typically two to seven days.

None of the following have been implicated in this outbreak:

- Berries other than strawberries;
- Strawberries sold since Aug. 1;
- Strawberries sold in supermarkets;
- Strawberries picked at Jaquith Strawberry Farm's U-pick field;
- Strawberries grown in southwest Washington state.

People sickened include residents of Washington, Clatsop, and Multnomah counties in Oregon. Of the confirmed cases, seven have been hospitalized, and one elderly woman in Washington County died from kidney failure associated with *E. coli* O157:H7 infection.

Oregon Public Health experts have been working with county public health officials and the Oregon Department of Agriculture to track the infection cases.

*E. coli* is a common inhabitant of the gastrointestinal tract and is usually harmless. But *E. coli* O157:H7 is a strain of the bacterium carried by some animals, that can contaminate food and water, and that produces toxins that can cause mild to severe intestinal illness, including severe cramps and diarrhea that is often bloody.

Some patients develop complications that require hospitalization. Approximately 5 percent of infected persons, especially young children and the elderly, suffer serious and potentially fatal kidney damage. Antibiotics are not recommended for treatment of an *E. coli* O157:H7 infection, and they may actually make kidney failure more likely. People infected with *E. coli* O157 should rest and drink plenty of fluids to reduce fatigue and dehydration.

Public health officials emphasize that fruits and vegetables are important to a healthy diet; at least five servings per day are recommended. However, people need to take the following precautions with any uncooked produce:

1. Wash fruits and vegetables thoroughly before eating them.
2. Keep fruits and vegetables and other raw food separated from cooked food.
3. Wash your hands thoroughly with soap after handling raw foods, as well as before eating, after using the toilet, and after changing diapers.

The list of locations where Jaquith strawberries were sold can be found at <http://oregon.gov/ODA/FSD/strawberries.shtml>.