

Rocky Ford cantaloupe linked to Listeria outbreak

Gus Lopez, Director of the Cheyenne-Laramie County Health Department, said, “People at high risk for listeria infection should not eat cantaloupe from the Rocky Ford growing region. Recently the cantaloupe has been linked to a multistate outbreak of Listeriosis. Colorado officials expect additional test results later this week that may help identify the specific source of the cantaloupe linked to the multistate outbreak.”

People who are at high risk for listeriosis are people age 60 and older; those with weakened immune systems from transplants or certain chronic diseases, immunosuppressive therapies or medications; and pregnant women. Healthy adults under age 60 rarely develop this illness.

Eleven of Colorado’s 13 listeriosis cases now are linked to the multistate outbreak. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention is coordinating the multistate investigation with the affected states of Colorado, Nebraska, Oklahoma and Texas, as well as the Food and Drug Administration and the U.S. Department of Agriculture’s Food Safety Inspection Service. The Colorado Department of Public Health and Environment also is working with local public health partners on the investigation. No cases have been identified in Wyoming.

In general, Consumers and food preparers should wash their hands before and after handling any melon. The surface of melons such as cantaloupes should be washed and dried with a clean cloth or paper towel before cutting. Cut melon should be promptly refrigerated at less than 41 F / 5 C (32-34 F is optimal for cut melon storage.) Cut melons left at room temperature for more than four hours should be discarded.

Eating food contaminated with *Listeria monocytogenes* can cause listeriosis, an uncommon but potentially fatal infection. Symptoms of listeriosis can include fever and muscle aches, and also can include diarrhea, headache, stiff neck, confusion and convulsions. Listeriosis also can cause miscarriages and stillbirths.

Antibiotics given promptly can cure the illness and prevent infection of a fetus. Even with prompt treatment, some *Listeria* infections result in death. This is particularly likely in older adults and in people with other serious medical problems.

For more information contact the Cheyenne-Laramie County Health Department at 633-4090. Additional information may also be available on the CDC website at: <http://www.cdc.gov/nczved/divisions/dfbmd/diseases/listeriosis/>