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New Mexico Department of Health Identifies Nine People with Listeria Infection And Three Have Died

(Santa Fe) – The New Mexico Department of Health (DOH) has identified nine cases of Listeria infection throughout the state with three of these cases resulting in death. Colorado has also had a significant increase in cases of Listeria. Their preliminary results have identified cantaloupe as the likely source of the Listeria outbreak. All 11 of Colorado's confirmed cases consumed cantaloupe. In New Mexico, all 9 patients had consumed cantaloupe. Other states have also identified Listeria cases that are likely linked to this outbreak. New Mexico's cases are pending molecular fingerprinting laboratory tests at the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) to see if they are part of the same outbreak.

All of the ill people in New Mexico have been hospitalized, including the three fatalities. The fatal cases were: a 93-year-old man from Bernalillo County, a 61-year-old female from Curry County, and a 63-year-old man from Bernalillo County. The other hospitalized cases in New Mexico come from Bernalillo, Chaves, Otero, De Baca, and Lea counties. The ill people range in age from the 43 to 96 and include 4 men and 5 women. Illness onset ranges from August 20th to early September.

“We extend our sympathy to the families and friends of those who have died from this infection,” said Dr. Catherine Torres, Cabinet Secretary for DOH. “At this time, based on the preliminary findings in Colorado, we are cautioning people who are at high risk for Listeria infection to avoid eating cantaloupe.”

CDC is coordinating the multistate investigation with affected states, the Food and Drug Administration and the U.S. Department of Agriculture's Food Safety Inspection Service. DOH is working on the investigation with local public health partners and the New Mexico Environment Department's Environmental Health Bureau, which has already begun investigating possible sources of the outbreak. Field inspectors have already begun to visit distributors around the state to take samples for further analysis. No recalls have been issued at this time.



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Listeriosis, a serious infection usually caused by eating food contaminated with the bacterium *Listeria monocytogenes*, is an important public health problem in the United States. The disease primarily affects older adults, pregnant women, newborns, and adults with weakened immune systems. However, rarely, persons without these risk factors can also be affected. The risk may be reduced by following a few simple recommendations.

It is important for people at high risk to follow the standard CDC guidance about Listeria. People can decrease their risk of Listeria infection by avoiding: deli meats unless reheated to an internal temperature of 165° F, refrigerated pâté or meat spreads, refrigerated smoked seafood, and soft cheeses such as queso fresco and brie unless they are made with pasteurized milk.

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 potentially 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 DOH Epidemiology Department at (505) 827-0006 or visit the CDC website at <http://www.cdc.gov/nczved/divisions/dfbmd/diseases/listeriosis/>.

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