

CDC Warns of Deadly Listeria in Cantaloupe

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September 14, 2011 — Individuals in the United States who are at high risk for listeriosis should avoid eating cantaloupes from the Rocky Ford region of Colorado, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) warns.

Included in the warning are older adults, immunocompromised individuals, and pregnant women.

An outbreak of *Listeria monocytogenes* has been reported among 15 persons in 4 states, including Colorado (11), Nebraska (1), Oklahoma (1), and Texas (2). All were hospitalized, and 1 death resulted. Illnesses began on or after August 15, 2011, and mostly affected immunocompromised individuals, women, and those older than 60 years (age range, 38 to 96 years; median age, 84 years; women, 73%).

Additional cases in several other states are being investigated for a connection, officials said. Moreover, cases occurring after August 26, 2011, may not have yet been reported because of a time lag in diagnosis.

Several outbreaks of *Listeria* food-borne illness are reported each year in the United States, primarily associated with deli meats, hot dogs, and Mexican-style soft cheeses made with unpasteurized milk. Although produce is not often identified as a source, prior outbreaks have been linked to sprouts (2009) and celery (2010).

Because contaminated cantaloupes may still be marketed in grocery stores, the CDC advises consumers to check the label or inquire whether the fruit was obtained from the Rocky Ford region of Colorado; if so, the product should be disposed of in a closed plastic bag placed in a sealed trash can to avoid consumption by animals.

Individuals who think they may have become ill from eating potentially contaminated cantaloupes should immediately consult a healthcare professional.

Symptoms include fever and muscle aches, as well as headache, stiff neck, confusion, loss of balance, and convulsions. Although pregnant women typically experience only a mild influenza-like illness, *Listeria* infections during gestation can lead to miscarriage, stillbirth, premature delivery, and life-threatening infection in newborns.

More information about avoiding listeriosis in food and general melon safety advice is available on the CDC's Web site.