FDA NEWS RELEASE

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Public Health Agencies Collaborate to Prevent Further Illnesses from Norovirus Outbreak Associated with Oysters Recently Harvested from Area Near Port Sulphur, La.

The U.S. Food and Drug Administration is working with state health officials from Mississippi and Louisiana to notify consumers, food service operators and retailers nationwide about an outbreak of norovirus associated with oysters recently harvested from an area near Port Sulphur, La. known as Area 7. The oysters were sold or distributed nationwide.

Public health agencies are warning consumers not to purchase or eat oysters from the affected area and warning retailers and food-service operators not to sell or serve them. Louisiana's Area 7 is in the Gulf of Mexico near the mouth of the Mississippi River.

The FDA was notified by state authorities that nearly a dozen consumers in Mississippi fell ill with norovirus after eating raw oysters from the affected area on March 10. Norovirus is a foodborne pathogen that can cause acute gastroenteritis in humans.

The Louisiana Department of Health and Hospitals has recalled oysters harvested from Area 7 on March 6 through March 24, 2010. State health officials closed the area to harvesting on March 24 to protect the public health.

Public health officials are currently working to investigate potential sources of pollution that may have caused the area to become contaminated.

Consumers who are uncertain about the origin of oysters they have in their possession should contact the place of purchase to determine if the oysters are from the affected area. Retailers and food service operators can check the tag or labeling that should accompany all raw molluscan shellfish to verify their origin.

Eleven people reported becoming sick after eating raw oysters at a conference center in Jackson County, Miss. Test results by the Mississippi State Department of Health confirmed that the patients were infected with norovirus.

Symptoms of norovirus illness usually include nausea, vomiting, diarrhea, and some stomach cramping. Sometimes people also have a low-grade fever, chills, headache, muscle aches, and a general sense of tiredness. The illness often begins suddenly, and the

infected person may feel very sick. In most people the illness is self-limiting with symptoms lasting for one or two days.

People who have eaten raw oysters harvested from the affected area during the specified dates and have had symptoms of norovirus infection are encouraged to contact their health care professionals and local health departments.

People with weak immune systems, including those affected by AIDS, chronic alcohol abuse, liver, stomach or blood disorders, cancer, diabetes, or kidney disease and those taking certain medications for rheumatoid arthritis or cancer chemotherapy, should avoid raw oyster consumption altogether, regardless of where the oysters are harvested.

For more information on seafood safety, please visit www.cfsan.fda.gov/seafood1.html or call FDA's Food Safety Hotline at 1-888-SAFEFOOD.

For information on Norovirus, go to:
http://www.foodsafety.gov/poisoning/causes/bacteriaviruses/norovirus.html

For additional information on seafood, go to:
http://www.foodsafety.gov/keep/types/seafood/index.html

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