



NEWS RELEASE

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Oregon sees more outbreaks of foodborne illness caused by *E. coli* bacteria in summer months

There are more outbreaks of foodborne illness due to *E. coli* bacteria during the summer months, according to a new report issued by Multnomah County Health Department, "[Food Safety](#)". Of the 68 reportable *E. coli* cases in Oregon in 2008, 49 (72%) were reported during June thru September. Foodborne diseases can cause illnesses ranging from mild diarrhea and vomiting to life-threatening conditions like severe dehydration or kidney failure. While everyone is potentially at risk, very young children, the elderly, and individuals with weakened immune systems are most likely to experience serious effects from foodborne illness.

Some of the more common foodborne illnesses are caused by *E. coli*, *Salmonella*, and *Campylobacter*, which are all bacterial pathogens. These bacteria can grow if proper food handling practices are not followed. Foodborne illnesses are a major health burden in the U.S.; diseases caused by the major pathogens alone are estimated to cost up to \$44 billion annually in medical costs and lost productivity. Diarrhea is the second most common infectious illness in the U.S., accounting for one in every six diagnoses.

Multnomah County is responsible for monitoring the local food service industry to prevent the spread of disease. In 2008, Multnomah County Health Department performed approximately 10,460 food service inspections at restaurants, special events, street vendors, hotels and motels, child care centers, schools and adult foster care facilities. In addition, 18,114 Food Handler Cards were issued. Food service workers must study the Food Handler Manual and pass an exam before obtaining a food handler card within 30 days of beginning work.

A few simple precautions can reduce the risk of foodborne diseases:

- Wash your hands with soap and water before preparing food
- Cook poultry, meats and seafood adequately
- Keep food at the correct temperature (hot foods kept hot and cold foods kept cold)
- Avoid cross-contamination of raw meats with ready-to-eat foods

According to Multnomah County Health Department Director Lillian Shirley, "We can all do our part to help protect our families, friends and ourselves by following proper food preparation guidelines. If you are unsure about whether a food is safe to eat, remember the advice: when in doubt, throw it out!"

Additional food safety hints can be found at: <http://mchealth.org/mchealthinspect/foodsafes.htm>

The full report is available online at: http://www.mchealth.org/hra/haq/summer2009_food_safety.pdf

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