

Food borne illness outbreak info sheet #3

Salmonella in Foster Farms chicken

October 10, 2013

Outbreak info: As of October 7, 2013, the US Centers for Disease Control (CDC) has reported 278 cases of *Salmonella* Heidelberg infections in 17 states, including 213 cases in California, 15 in Washington State, 4 in Colorado and 1 in Arkansas (none currently reported in Kansas or Missouri). One of the concerning aspects of this outbreak is the higher hospitalization rate (42% of ill persons, double the normal rate). This may be related to the fact that the outbreak strains of *Salmonella* are resistant to several commonly prescribed antibiotics. No deaths have been reported.

Salmonellosis is a very common food borne disease, but officials noticed a higher than normal rate of *Salmonella* infections, particularly in California, in recent months (beginning in March 2013). The numbers of cases may continue to rise as cases are investigated. More information on the outbreak is available from:

www.cdc.gov/salmonella/heidelberg-10-13/index.html

Information on organism: Various types of *Salmonella* are very commonly found on raw poultry from any producer, as well as numerous other products (eggs, produce, spices, etc.) However, poultry with multi-drug resistant *Salmonella* is not common. Consumption of food contaminated with *Salmonella* can cause salmonellosis, one of the most common bacterial foodborne illnesses.

Salmonella infections can be life-threatening, especially to those with weak immune systems, such as infants, the elderly and persons with HIV infection or undergoing chemotherapy. The most common symptoms of salmonellosis are diarrhea, abdominal cramps, and fever within eight to 72 hours. Additional symptoms may include chills, headache, nausea and vomiting that can last up to seven days. More information on *Salmonella* is available from: www.cdc.gov/salmonella/general/index.html

What caused outbreak: Investigations have indicated that consumption of Foster Farms brand chicken (sold raw) produced at 3 facilities in California is the likely source of this outbreak. No product recalls have been issued thus far, as a recall is not required by law when intact poultry products (rather than ground) are linked to a *Salmonella* outbreak. *Salmonella* is commonly found on raw poultry, so consumers are expected to use safe handling practices with that product. The processor is now implementing a number of new food safety practices in its facility.

What to tell consumers:

- This outbreak and its investigation have been ongoing for a number of months, so it is not directly related to the government shutdown which is also currently occurring.

- Even during the government shutdown, USDA (or state) meat inspectors are still inspecting all the meat and poultry that they normally would. Therefore, *all meat and poultry available in grocery stores, restaurants, and in food service has passed inspection*. More information on the impact of the government shutdown on food safety is available [here](#) and [here](#).
- CDC, which coordinates multi-state food borne disease investigations, did furlough 68% of its workers in the government shutdown. However, they did call back 10 employees on Oct 8 to help with foodborne illness investigations.
- The products were mainly distributed to retail outlets in California, Oregon, and Washington State
- Raw poultry commonly has *Salmonella*, as well as *Campylobacter* and other organisms present. Therefore, it is always very important for consumers to properly handle and cook all raw poultry to prevent contamination from spreading to other foods and food contact surfaces or to be consumed.
 - Cook: To destroy *Salmonella* (even antibiotic-resistant strains) and other organisms that might be present, poultry should always be cooked to a minimum internal temperature of 165°F, checked with a food thermometer.
 - Separate:
 - Separate raw meat and poultry from other foods in your grocery shopping cart and in your refrigerator.
 - Use one cutting board for raw meat and poultry and a separate one for fresh produce and ready to eat foods.
 - Never place cooked food on a plate that previously held raw meat or poultry
 - Clean: Wash with hot, soapy water any utensils, cutting boards, dishes, and surfaces that might have touched raw meat or poultry to avoid cross contamination.
 - Hands should always be washed for 20 seconds before and after handling raw meat, poultry, or seafood.
 - Chill: Refrigerate (at or below 40°F) or freeze raw poultry, prepared foods, and leftovers within 2 hours (or 1 hour if temperatures are above 90°F).

More information:

- [Multistate Outbreak of Multidrug-Resistant Salmonella Heidelberg Infections Linked to Foster Farms Brand Chicken](#). CDC. October 8, 2013.
- USDA FSIS Public Health Alert. Oct 7, 2013 [Chicken Products Produced at Three Foster Farms Facilities](#)
- [Shutdown Not Impeding Salmonella Outbreak Investigation](#). Food Safety News. October 10, 2013.

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