



# Microbe Monthly

Communicable Disease Report

October 2011

El Paso County Public Health  
Communicable Disease/TB Program

## Recent Food Recalls: How safe is our food supply?

Two recent voluntary food recalls had a direct impact in El Paso County. On August 3, Cargill voluntarily recalled 36 million pounds of ground turkey products due to possible contamination with *Salmonella* Heidelberg. This strain of *S. Heidelberg* was also found to be multi-drug resistant. On September 14, Jensen Farms voluntarily recalled their Rocky Ford region cantaloupes for contamination with *Listeria monocytogenes*. For both recalls, there were illness among residents in El Paso County—1 case confirmed to the *S. Heidelberg* outbreak and 5 *Listeria* cases associated with the cantaloupe outbreak. The recent multistate outbreak of *Listeria* has become the deadliest national outbreak since 1998. As of October 3, a total of 100 laboratory-linked cases (30 in Colorado) have been reported with 18 deaths. All cases have had invasive listeriosis and most have occurred in elderly persons. Although recalled cantaloupe should have been removed from point-of-sale, the incubation period of *Listeria* is up to 2 months so more cases may be identified.

Some food recalls are initiated from routine inspections or food testing for bacterial pathogens that are done by the manufacturer. However, many recalls are initiated after a human outbreak has been linked to a specific food exposure. These alarming reports may raise questions about the safety of our food supply. Keeping the food supply safe is an integral function of the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) and the Food and Drug Administration (FDA). The Food Safety Inspection Service (FSIS) within the USDA directs efforts towards assuring the safety of meat, poultry and eggs. The FDA oversees food regulation for all other food types. Both FDA and FSIS work very closely with state and local public health agencies to perform traceback of food that has been epidemiologically linked to human illness from local investigations. For the *Listeria* outbreak, it was public health who uncovered the potential link to eating cantaloupe through patient interviews and epidemiologic study. Investigation of purchasing data from cases and further laboratory testing by FDA confirmed presence of outbreak strains of *Listeria* from cantaloupes grown at Jensen Farms.

For more information visit: [www.cdc.gov/foodsafety/](http://www.cdc.gov/foodsafety/)  
[www.fda.gov/Food/FoodSafety/default.htm](http://www.fda.gov/Food/FoodSafety/default.htm)  
[www.fsis.usda.gov/](http://www.fsis.usda.gov/)



## El Paso County Disease Trends — Reports Received in September

- 45 communicable disease (CD) cases: *Campylobacter* (11), *Giardia* (3), chronic hepatitis B (4), invasive pneumococcal disease (3), listeriosis (4), pertussis (6), *Salmonella* (2), STEC – shiga toxin producing *E. coli* (3), varicella (4), and viral meningitis (5).
- 17 possible foodborne illness complaints were received (11 related to cantaloupe).
- Four outbreaks were investigated: 3 gastrointestinal illness (2 long-term care facilities, 1 bus tour group), all suspected to be caused by norovirus spread person-to-person; and 1 pertussis outbreak (5 cases) connected to a church.
- 21 calls were received regarding exposures to potentially rabid animals. Eleven animals (5 bats, 2 skunks, 2 raccoons, 1 cat, 1 goat) were tested for rabies because there were either human or other pet animal exposures. One bat tested positive for rabies and had potentially exposed one domestic pet. The current 2011 total of animals testing positive for rabies in El Paso County is 15 (9 skunks, 5 bats, 1 fox).
- Tuberculosis (TB) Program staff investigated 1 new or suspect active TB case and conducted Direct Observed Therapy for 4 cases.
- CD Program continues to be actively involved in the nationwide *Listeria* outbreak investigation and have responded to numerous calls from the public and medical providers. To date there have been 5 cases (including 1 death) reported in El Paso County.

## Hot Topics: State and National

- Surveillance for the 2011/12 influenza season formally began in Colorado on October 2, 2011. One PCR-confirmed case of influenza H3 has been reported in Colorado. Influenza-associated hospitalizations and pediatric influenza-associated deaths are reportable conditions in Colorado. Influenza vaccine is widely available and recommended for any person ages 6 months and older who wishes to reduce their risk of influenza and do not have a contraindication to vaccination.
- **Dr. Robert Belknap from Denver Health TB Program will present a TB update on January 12 at 7:00 a.m. at Grand Rounds at Penrose Hospital. Focus of the discussion will be on the appropriate use and interpretation of interferon-gamma release assays (IGRAs). Mark your calendars now—more details to follow!**

## Contact Information

**El Paso County Public Health has moved to the Citizens Service Center at 1675 W. Garden of the Gods Road,**

### CD/TB Program

Weekday Hours (M-F) 719-578-3220  
After-Hours Emergency 719-235-2278

**Public Health regular hours are Monday—Friday,  
7:30 a.m. to 4:30 p.m.  
[www.elpasocountyhealth.org](http://www.elpasocountyhealth.org)**