



News Release

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Contact: [Donn Moyer](#), Communications Office

360-236-4076

Clover sprouts eaten raw are likely source of *E. coli* illness outbreak

Health officials say seven confirmed and three probable cases are linked to clover sprouts

OLYMPIA — An outbreak of *E. coli* cases led state health officials to warn consumers not to eat raw clover sprouts from an Idaho producer. The sprouts under investigation are linked to seven confirmed and three probable cases of *E. coli* O121 illnesses in Washington and Idaho. Five of those patients were hospitalized; there have been no deaths.

Five cases were reported in Spokane County, two in King County, and three in Kootenai County, Idaho. Results from initial investigations indicate a strong link to eating raw clover sprouts produced by Evergreen Fresh Sprouts, LLC of Idaho. Sprouts were eaten in sandwiches at several food establishments including Jimmy John's Gourmet Sandwiches locations in King and Spokane counties, as well as two Pita Pit locations in Spokane County, and Daanen's Deli as well as a Jimmy John's location in Kootenai County. The restaurants where the cases reported eating raw clover sprouts have voluntarily suspended serving sprouts.

The producer also distributed sprouts around the northwest to other restaurants, as well as retail grocery stores where consumers may buy them for home consumption.

“We advise people not to eat raw clover sprouts from Evergreen Fresh Sprouts until further notice,” said Washington State Health Officer Dr. Kathy Lofy. “If you have these products at home, you should throw them out.”

While the outbreak appears to be linked to clover sprouts from Evergreen Fresh Sprouts in Idaho, the source of the sprout seed hasn't yet been determined and remains under investigation.

The type of [E. coli in this outbreak](#) is a strain of Shiga toxin-producing *E. coli* (STEC O121) similar to *E. coli* O157:H7. It can cause bloody diarrhea, abdominal cramps, fever, and vomiting. It can sometimes result in severe, life-threatening illness and may be fatal.

Raw sprouts likely cause of E. coli outbreak

May 21, 2014

Page 2

“Anyone who thinks they may have become ill from eating contaminated sprouts should consult their health care provider,” said Lofy. “The elderly and very young children are more likely to become severely ill from Shiga toxin-producing *E. coli* infection.”

Local and state health officials in Washington and Idaho are investigating, working with the U.S. Food and Drug Administration and the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

Sprouts are a known [source of foodborne illness](#). Seeds and beans need warm and humid conditions to sprout and grow. These conditions are ideal for bacteria growth. Since 1996, at least 30 nationally reported outbreaks of foodborne illness associated with different types of raw and lightly cooked sprouts have occurred. Most of these outbreaks were caused by *E. coli* and *Salmonella*. In most sprout outbreaks, the restaurant is not the source of the contamination, which usually happens when the seeds are grown or harvested and is often impossible to wash off. It’s important to store sprouts in a refrigerator to inhibit bacterial growth. Thorough cooking will kill the bacteria.

The [Department of Health website](#) (www.doh.wa.gov) is your source for *a healthy dose of information*. Also, [find us on Facebook](#) and [follow us on Twitter](#).

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