Health advisory: *E. coli* O157:H7 outbreak in Whatcom County, Washington
Updated June 3, 2015 at 3:00 PM PDT

[Note: This information will be updated Monday-Friday at 3:00 PM PDT].

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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Investigation Summary:

The Whatcom County Health Department in Bellingham is investigating an outbreak of Shiga toxin-producing *E. coli* O157:H7 infections. The Washington State Department of Health and the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention are assisting with the investigation.

Disease investigators are now calculating case counts based on lab-confirmed infection *with E. coli* 0157:H7 **and** physician-diagnosed cases of hemolytic uremic syndrome (HUS). The official case count will be adjusted regularly as the investigation proceeds.

As of 2:00 PM PDT June 3:

- Twenty-five people are confirmed cases.
  - Nine of these confirmed cases are considered secondary cases (the ill person didn't go to the event but had close contact with someone who did attend).
- No one has died.
- Ten people have been hospitalized.
- Six people have developed hemolytic uremic syndrome (HUS).
- Illnesses in several other people are under investigation.
- The investigation includes collecting several environmental samples from the venue for analysis. Results as of 06/03/2015:
  - Four of 10 areas sampled produced results that match (indistinguishable from) the *E. coli* O157:H7 outbreak strain.

All of the ill people attended the Milk Makers Fest between April 21 and 23 at the Northwest Fairgrounds in Lynden; helped with the event between April 20 and 24; or were close contacts of ill people associated with the event. Most of the ill people are children, including older children who helped with the event. More than 1,000 primary school children from all school districts in Whatcom County attended the event on these days.

Whatcom County Health Department is working with community health care providers to identify cases, and interviewing patients and their parents to investigate the source of the outbreak. The source investigation involves collecting information from interviews as well as from clinical and environmental laboratory tests. A common source or sources has not been determined. Health officials expect that it will take several weeks to collect and analyze the information. Even if a common source is not found, potential risk factors will be identified, which will provide information that may reduce the risk of an outbreak in the future.

Advice to the Public:

People who attended the Milk Makers Fest, or have close contact with someone ill who did, **and** have signs or symptoms of *E. coli* infection should see a doctor. People usually get sick from *E. coli* 2-8 days (average of 3-4 days) after swallowing the germ (organism). Only people who have symptoms should see a doctor in relation to this outbreak.

- Most people infected with *E. coli* develop diarrhea (often bloody) and abdominal cramps, and most people recover within a week.
- Some illnesses last longer and can be more severe, resulting in a type of kidney failure called hemolytic uremic syndrome (HUS).
    - HUS can occur in people of any age, but is most common in young children under five, older adults, and people with weakened immune systems.
- Symptoms of HUS can include fever; abdominal pain; pale skin tone; fatigue and irritability; small, unexplained bruises or bleeding from the nose and mouth; and decreased urination.
    - People who have these symptoms should seek emergency medical care immediately.
    - Antibiotics and antidiarrheal medicines should not be given unless *E. coli* is ruled out, since they may increase the risk of HUS in people with *E. coli* infections.

The outbreak appears to be over; however, the investigation into the source of the infections is ongoing. Secondary cases (people who become ill after contact with a person with *E. coli* infection) may be reported. It's important for people infected with *E. coli* or those with a family member infected with *E. coli* to follow these precautions:

- Wash your hands thoroughly with soap and water immediately after using the restroom or changing a child's diaper.
- Wash your hands before and after preparing food for yourself and others.
- Stay home from school or work while diarrhea persists; most people can return to work or school when they no longer have diarrhea. Special precautions are needed for food handlers, health care workers, and child care providers and attendees. Check with your employer before returning to work, and check with your child's child care center before resuming child care.

More information on *E. coli* is available at the CDC website.