



Media Update

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Chipotle-linked E. coli outbreak update: First tests do not find E.coli *Exact source remains unknown*

OLYMPIA -- Food safety and disease investigation staff from the Washington State Department of Health are still working to investigate the cause of an outbreak of illnesses linked to 27 cases of E. coli O26 illnesses in Washington. The first round of test results did not find E. coli bacteria in food samples taken from several Chipotle restaurants according to officials at the Food and Drug Administration.

The 27 cases, connected in this outbreak include people from Clark (11), Cowlitz (2), Island (2), King (6), Skagit (5), and Whatcom (1) counties. Ten of these people were hospitalized; no Hemolytic Uremic Syndrome (HUS) complications or deaths have been reported. Most people who are ill report eating at Chipotle restaurants before getting sick.

In Washington, the most recent case reported eating at Chipotle on October 24. While health officials believe the risk for new exposures is very low, the number of cases in the outbreak may rise or fall as pending lab tests determine if more ill people have this specific strain of E.coli infection. In Washington, four tests are still in progress.

Food outbreak investigations do not always identify a specific food source. A common reason for this is that the contaminated food source was consumed before the food samples were collected.

Chipotle is now carrying out a range of actions to prepare for reopening:

- Every Chipotle in the state disposed of all food items, sanitized each facility, and will bring in all new foods before reopening.
- Selected high-risk food items will be pretested before heading to the restaurants.

- All fresh produce will be carefully rinsed, and sanitized.
- County public health food safety inspectors will visit each restaurant to verify these actions.

The type of [E. coli in this outbreak](#) is a strain of Shiga toxin-producing E. coli (STEC O26). It can cause bloody diarrhea, abdominal cramps, fever, and vomiting, and sometimes result in severe, life-threatening illness which can, in some cases, be fatal.

Local and state health officials in Washington and [Oregon](#) are investigating, working with the U.S. Food and Drug Administration and the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

Each year, thousands of Washington residents become sick because of food that is contaminated. There are simple steps to lower the risk of becoming ill from a [food-related illness](#). Learn more about preventing food-related illness on our website.

Media Availability: Tuesday, November 10; 1-2 p.m. Reporters can call to schedule a radio or in-person interview with Washington State Department of Health's Medical Epidemiologist for Communicable Diseases, Scott Lindquist M.D. Call 360-584-4595 to schedule.

The [Department of Health website](#) (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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