

NEW MEXICO DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH  
Secretary Catherine Torres, M.D.

For Immediate Release:  
May 2, 2011

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### **New Mexico Dept. of Health Helps Identify Cause of Multi-State Salmonella Outbreak**

(Santa Fe) -- The New Mexico Department of Health played a pivotal role in the investigation of a multistate outbreak of human *Salmonella* Typhimurium infections associated with exposure to clinical and teaching microbiology laboratories. The Department of Health is collaborating with the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) and public health officials from other states in the investigation.

A total of 73 individuals infected with the outbreak strain of *Salmonella* Typhimurium have been reported from 35 states, including three cases from Bernalillo County. The multistate investigation started in Fall 2010.

“Collaboration between the medical community and the Department’s laboratory staff, epidemiologists and public health nurses was very important in determining the cause of this outbreak,” said Department of Health Cabinet Secretary, Dr. Catherine Torres. “The Department of Health continues to provide vital information on recognizing and stopping nationwide disease outbreaks.”

The Department of Health’s Scientific Laboratory used DNA analysis of the *Salmonella* bacteria submitted from three people to show that they had the same outbreak strain. Interviews of the infected Bernalillo County residents showed that one case was enrolled in a microbiology course that handled *Salmonella*, while the other two cases were children of students in the same course. An isolate of *Salmonella* from the classroom laboratory stock was found to be identical to that of the infected cases and also indistinguishable from a commercially available *Salmonella* Typhimurium strain used in laboratory settings across the nation.

The Department of Health advises that students should be aware that bacteria used in microbiology laboratories can make them or others who live in their household sick—especially young children—even if they have never visited the laboratory. It is possible for bacteria to be brought into the home through contaminated lab coats, pens, notebooks and other items that are used in the microbiology laboratory.

To avoid infection in students and others working in microbiology laboratories:

- Wash hands frequently while working in and immediately after leaving the microbiology laboratory and follow proper hand washing practices.

- Do not bring food, drinks or personal items like car keys, cell phones and mp3 players into the laboratory.
- Do not bring pens, notebooks, and other items used inside of the microbiology laboratory into your home.
- Wear a lab coat or other protective uniform over personal clothing when working in a microbiology laboratory; leave it in the laboratory if possible when you are finished. Take the lab coat out of the laboratory only to clean it.

Anyone with symptoms is encouraged to seek medical care for diagnosis and treatment. Signs and symptoms of *Salmonella* infection include:

- Persons infected with Salmonella develop diarrhea, fever, and abdominal cramps 12 to 72 hours after infection.
- The illness usually lasts four to seven days, and most persons recover without treatment.
- In some persons, the diarrhea may be so severe that the patient needs to be hospitalized.
- The elderly, infants, and those with impaired immune systems are more likely to have a severe illness from Salmonella infection.

More information on this outbreak can be found at the CDC website at <http://www.cdc.gov/salmonella/typhimurium-laboratory/042711/index.html>