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State Issues Voluntary Recall Notice; Multistate Listeriosis Outbreak Update

New Mexico Case Count Up to Ten

(Santa Fe) – The New Mexico Environment Department's (NMED) Environmental Health Bureau, in conjunction with the New Mexico Department of Health (DOH) is issuing a voluntary recall notice all state produce retailers, requesting that any cantaloupe grown in the Rocky Ford growing area of southern Colorado be temporarily pulled from store shelves. The Bureau is announcing this voluntary recall in anticipation of a nationwide recall in the near future. Likewise, early indications from several states, including New Mexico, link the recent Listeriosis outbreak to these cantaloupes.

The New Mexico Department of Health (DOH) has identified **ten** cases of Listeria infection to date, with three of these cases resulting in death. In New Mexico, all 9 patients who have been interviewed reported eating cantaloupe prior to illness.

All of the ill people in New Mexico have been hospitalized, including the three fatalities. The fatal cases were: a 93-year-old man from Bernalillo County, a 61-year-old female from Curry County, and a 63-year-old man from Bernalillo County. The other hospitalized cases in New Mexico come from Bernalillo, Chaves, Otero, De Baca, Valencia and Lea counties. The ill people range in age from the 43 to 96 and include 4 men and 6 women. Illness onset ranges from August 20th to early September.

Ongoing collaborative investigations by local, state, and federal public health and regulatory agencies indicate the likely source of the outbreak is a type of cantaloupe, called Rocky Ford cantaloupes, which are grown in the Rocky Ford region of southeastern Colorado. These cantaloupes were harvested in August and September, distributed widely in the United States. New Mexican residents should refrain from purchasing or handling cantaloupe grown in the Rocky Ford growing area. If cantaloupe has already been purchased, citizens are recommended not to eat the cantaloupe and asked to throw it away.

The New Mexico Department of Health and Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) now advise persons at high risk for listeriosis, including older adults, persons with weakened



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immune systems, newborns, and pregnant women, to not eat cantaloupes marketed as coming from the Rocky Ford region of Colorado.

General Melon Safety Advice:

- Consumers and food preparers should wash their hands before and after handling any whole melon, such as cantaloupe, watermelon, or honeydew.
- Wash the melons and dry them with a clean cloth or paper towel before cutting.
- Cut melon should be promptly consumed or refrigerated at or less than 40 degrees F (32-34 degrees F is optimal for storage of cut melon).
- Cut melons left at room temperature for more than 4 hours should be discarded.

Listeriosis, a serious infection usually caused by eating food contaminated with the bacterium *Listeria monocytogenes*, is an important public health problem in the United States. A person with listeriosis usually has fever and muscle aches, often preceded by diarrhea or other gastrointestinal symptoms. Almost everyone who is diagnosed with listeriosis has “invasive” infection, in which the bacteria spread from the intestines to the blood stream or other body sites.

The symptoms vary with the infected person:

- Persons other than pregnant women: Symptoms, in addition to fever and muscle aches, can include headache, stiff neck, confusion, loss of balance, and convulsions.
- Pregnant women: Pregnant women typically experience only a mild, flu-like illness. However, infections during pregnancy can lead to miscarriage, stillbirth, premature delivery, or life-threatening infection of the newborn.

Antibiotics given promptly can potentially cure the illness and prevent infection of a fetus. Even with prompt treatment, some *Listeria* infections result in death. If you feel sick with symptoms of *Listeria* and have consumed cantaloupe, please contact your healthcare provider.

The risk may be reduced by following a few simple recommendations:

- It is important for people at high risk to follow the standard CDC guidance about *Listeria*. People can decrease their risk of *Listeria* infection by avoiding: deli meats unless reheated to an internal temperature of 165° F, refrigerated pâté or meat spreads, refrigerated smoked seafood, and soft cheeses such as queso fresco and brie unless they are made with pasteurized milk.

More information about this outbreak of Listeriosis and recommendations to reduce the risk of getting Listeriosis from food can be found on CDC’s webpage:

<http://www.cdc.gov/nczved/divisions/dfbmd/diseases/listeriosis/091211.html>

For media inquiring about the voluntary recall, please direct your questions to Jim Winchester at (505) 231-8800.

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