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New Mexico Department of Health Identifies an Increase in Listeria Infections

(Santa Fe) – The New Mexico Department of Health (DOH) has identified six cases of Listeria infection in New Mexico in the past 3 weeks, which is a greater number of cases than expected for this time period. Colorado has also had a significant increase in cases of Listeria. Their preliminary results have identified cantaloupe as the likely source of the Listeria outbreak. All 9 of Colorado's cases consumed cantaloupe. In New Mexico, 4 out of 5 patients interviewed had consumed cantaloupe. Other states have also identified Listeria cases that are likely linked to this outbreak. New Mexico's cases are pending molecular fingerprinting laboratory tests at the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) to see if they are part of the same outbreak.

CDC is coordinating the multistate investigation with affected states, the Food and Drug Administration and the U.S. Department of Agriculture's Food Safety Inspection Service. DOH is working on the investigation with local public health partners and the New Mexico Environment Department's Environmental Health Bureau, which has already begun investigating possible sources of the outbreak. Field inspectors will be visiting distributors as early as this weekend.

All of the ill people in New Mexico were hospitalized, including one fatality. Confirmed Listeria cases in New Mexico are in the following counties: Bernalillo, Chaves, Curry, De Baca, and Otero. The ill people range in age from the 43 to 93 and include 3 men and 3 women. Illness onset ranges from August 20th to early September.

“New Mexico continues to aggressively investigate all Listeria cases since the disease can have severe outcomes, especially in immune compromised individuals,” said Dr. Catherine Torres, Cabinet Secretary for DOH. “At this time, based on the preliminary findings in Colorado, we are cautioning people who are at high risk for Listeria infection to avoid consumption of cantaloupe.”



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People who are at high risk for listeriosis include: people age 60 and older, people with weakened immune systems from transplants or certain chronic diseases, immunosuppressive therapies or medications, and pregnant women. Healthy adults rarely develop severe illness.

It also 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.”

Eating food contaminated with *Listeria monocytogenes* can cause listeriosis, an uncommon but potentially fatal infection. Symptoms of listeriosis can include fever and muscle aches, and also can include diarrhea, headache, stiff neck, confusion and convulsions. Listeriosis also can cause miscarriages and stillbirths.

Antibiotics given promptly can cure the illness and prevent infection of a fetus. Even with prompt treatment, some *Listeria* infections result in death. This is particularly likely in older adults and in people with other serious medical problems.

For more information, contact DOH Epidemiologist, Dr. Michael Landen at (505) 827-0006 or visit the CDC website at <http://www.cdc.gov/nczved/divisions/dfbmd/diseases/listeriosis/>.

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