

## 2018 May Health Notes by Evelyn Ames

### *CDC and FDA Advice to Consumers about Romaine Lettuce*

The Food and Drug Administration and Centers for Disease Prevention and Control are required by law to issue warnings about food safety. The latest media blitz is about romaine lettuce and bacterial contamination (*E. coli*). **Information collected to date indicates that romaine lettuce from the Yuma, Arizona growing region could be contaminated with *E. coli* O157:H7.** This particular strain can produce a Shiga toxin and severely damage the kidneys. Several cases of illness have been reported. In an update last week, the CDC said that 53 people have been affected by the *E. coli* outbreak across 16 different states (Washington, Idaho, Missouri, Illinois, Ohio, Pennsylvania, Virginia, New York, New Jersey, Connecticut, Michigan, Arizona, Alaska, California, Louisiana and Montana). "Most people reported eating a salad at a restaurant, and romaine lettuce was the only common ingredient identified among the salads eaten," the FDA reports. The restaurants reported using bagged, chopped romaine lettuce to make salads. "The most recent information collected by FDA, in conjunction with federal, state, and local partners, indicates that the romaine lettuce that ill people ate was likely grown or originated from the winter growing areas in Yuma, Arizona. No specific grower, supplier, distributor, or brand has been identified at this time."

CDC advises restaurants and retailers not to serve or sell any romaine lettuce. This includes whole heads and hearts of romaine, chopped romaine, and salads and salad mixes containing romaine lettuce.

CDC's advice to consumers:

- Do not buy or eat romaine lettuce at a store or restaurant unless you can confirm it is not romaine lettuce from the Yuma, Arizona, growing region. Product labels often do not identify growing regions; so, throw out any romaine lettuce if you're uncertain about where it was grown.
- Unless the source of the product is known, consumers anywhere in the United States who have any store-bought romaine lettuce at home should not eat it and should throw it away, even if some of it was eaten and no one has gotten sick. **This includes whole heads and hearts of romaine, chopped romaine, and salads and salad mixes containing romaine lettuce.** If you do not know if the lettuce is romaine, do not eat it and throw it away.
- Wash and sanitize drawers or shelves in refrigerators where romaine lettuce was stored. Follow these steps to clean refrigerator: items needed (sealed bags, warm, soapy water, clean towels, and optional water + bleach). Step 1- throw out recalled food and any food it touched. Step 2- empty refrigerator. Step 3 - wash removable parts. Step 4 – clean and sanitize inside refrigerator. Full explanation is found at <https://www.cdc.gov/foodsafety/communication/clean-refrigerator-steps.html>
- **Take action** if you have symptoms of an *E. coli* infection: Talk to your healthcare provider. Write down what you ate in the week before you started to get sick. Report your illness to the health department. Assist public health investigators by answering questions about your illness.



<https://www.cdc.gov/foodsafety/index.html>

Web page that provides links to recently posted food recalls.

<https://www.fda.gov/food/recallsoutbreaksemergencies/recalls/default.htm>