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**State Environment, Health Departments Continue To Alert Consumers, Retail Establishments on Risks of Salmonella Outbreak Linked to Contaminated Tomatoes**

*State Agencies Pursue Aggressive Investigation on Source of Contamination in New Mexico*

(Santa Fe, N.M.) The state Environment and Health departments continue to work together to investigate the source of contaminated tomatoes linked to Salmonella and to provide recommendations to consumers and retailers related to the issue.

The Environment Department is supplementing efforts by the U.S. Food and Drug Administration to trace the source of the suspect tomatoes and inform consumers, restaurants, food establishments, retailers and schools to pull contaminated tomatoes from shelves. The department is also recommending that consumers and retailers limit their consumption of tomatoes to the list of safe producers on FDA's Web site <http://www.fda.gov/oc/opacom/hottopics/tomatoes.html>.

"We are hearing of cases each day of people becoming ill from Salmonella linked to contaminated tomatoes in New Mexico," said state Environment Department Secretary Ron Curry. "We are working quickly with the Department of Health to identify the source of those tomatoes. We recommend that people limit their consumption of tomatoes to those from producers on FDA's list of safe sources."

Both departments are receiving calls from people who have become ill with gastrointestinal illnesses possibly linked to the contaminated fruit. The Environment Department has followed up on calls by contacting the suspect food establishment and making sure they are aware of the outbreak. The Environment Department is also verifying that those establishments understand they should only serve tomatoes from the FDA's list of safe sources.

The Environment Department's Food Program Bureau has called distributors and many restaurants to make sure they are no longer selling the suspect tomatoes and are only providing tomatoes on the FDA's list of safe sources. Environment Department Food Program inspectors, while conducting routine inspections of food establishments, are also verifying operators are aware of the outbreak and checking on the source of any tomatoes they may still have on the menu to verify that those fruits are on the safe list.

Once the source of the contaminated tomatoes has been identified, a mandatory recall of suspect tomatoes will be issued by the Environment Department. Under the Food Act, the Environment Department's Food Program Bureau has been given authority to protect consumers from contaminated food by requiring retailers to remove suspect foods from shelves and menus once a definite source has been identified.

Once FDA identifies the source, the Environment Department will use all available employees to visit restaurants and other food establishments to ensure those products are no longer on shelves or being sold. That effort would be similar to a huge recall the Environment Department managed after an outbreak of botulism linked to Castleberry's Chili in September 2007.

The New Mexico Department of Health continues to interview people who are sick with Salmonella Saintpaul to better understand the outbreak in New Mexico and to help prevent new cases.

"We are giving the FDA and CDC all the information we're collecting about our patients to help them trace the source of the contaminated tomatoes," said Health Secretary Dr. Alfredo Vigil. "We are being diligent in all aspects of our investigation because we want to prevent anyone else from getting sick with Salmonella."

Seventy patients from 17 New Mexico counties have reported becoming sick between May 11 and June 5. Recent cases that the Department of Health is investigating include a 14-year-old male and a 65-year-old male from Luna County, a 47-year-old male from Bernalillo and a 24-year-old male from McKinley County. Some of the most recent cases have told the Department of Health that they ate Roma and large round tomatoes at home. Others have been unsure of what kind of tomatoes they ate.

The Department of Health provides information on the outbreak to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention and to the U.S. Food and Drug Administration to help determine the source of the tomatoes. The Department of Health's Scientific Laboratory is following any new leads in the investigation and is testing tomatoes when the State is able to collect them from patients. If the Lab can find Salmonella Saintpaul on a tomato, it will help the FDA trace back the source of that tomato.

New Mexicans who suspect they may have become ill by consuming suspect tomatoes should contact their healthcare provider. Residents can also report their illness to their local NMED field office at (505) 476-8600. NMED will investigate links between the illness and suspect food establishments.

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