

Cantaloupes linked to fatal multi-state *Listeria monocytogenes* outbreak

4 deaths and 15 illnesses in Colorado, Nebraska, Oklahoma and Texas

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As a result of investigating a cluster of illnesses, the Colorado Department of Public Health and Environment has identified *Listeria monocytogenes* bacteria on cantaloupe collected from grocery stores and from an ill person's home.

Product traceback information from officials indicated these cantaloupes were harvested in the Rocky Ford region of Colorado. Outbreaks and recalls related to cantaloupes are common. At least 25 outbreaks have been linked to the fruit since 1990.

Research has shown a potential for bacteria to be pushed into the meat of the cantaloupe during slicing, and many authorities recommend washing cantaloupe before cutting. However, due to the roughness of the rind, it is difficult to wash away much of the bacteria. Using a scrub brush under running water (especially at the cut point) can reduce the risk of pathogen introduction.

Listeria monocytogenes can grow slowly at refrigeration temperatures in some foods including cantaloupe. *Listeria* on cut cantaloupe will only reach levels likely to cause illness after many days of storage at 41°F.



What you can do:



- Refrigerate cantaloupes quickly after slicing. Bacteria such as *Listeria* can grow quickly on the orange flesh of the fruit when held above 41°F.
- Ask suppliers about food safety risk-reduction practices including how they manage water, animal exclusion and staff.
- When washing the outside of a cantaloupe, vigorously use a scrub brush under running water to remove any easy-to-get to bacteria.
- Don't wash many cantaloupes at once by soaking in a sink. This could lead to pathogen transfer from one fruit to another.