The U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) has announced that cantaloupes grown in southwestern Indiana are the likely source of an outbreak that has sickened over 140 and led to two deaths. Investigation into the origin, production, handling practices and distribution of the product is ongoing.

CDC suggests that retailers and food service operators should not sell or serve cantaloupe grown in southwestern Indiana. According to CDC, many cantaloupes have the growing area identified with a sticker on the fruit. If no sticker is present, buyers should inquire about the source from suppliers.

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. 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.

What you can do

- Refrigerate cantaloupes quickly after slicing. Bacteria such as Salmonella and 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, cleaning and sanitation 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 multiple cantaloupes at once by soaking in a sink. This could lead to pathogen transfer from one fruit to another.

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