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MEAT TESTS POSITIVE FOR E. COLI

An *E. coli* 0157:H7 outbreak affecting twenty-seven people was recently investigated by Butte County Public Health (BCPH). The outbreak occurred among those who attended an event held in the community of Forest Ranch on September 6. The event was a fundraiser for the Forest Ranch Volunteer Fire Department. Cases ranged in age from two years old to one person in their 80's. Four cases were hospitalized and are now home recovering. BCPH is monitoring for secondary cases with assistance from local healthcare providers.

Cultures taken from leftover meat cooked at the event have grown *E. coli* 0157:H7 which matched the same bacteria isolated in the cases. The investigation continues to determine how the cooked meat was contaminated. Assisting BCPH has been the California Department of Public Health as well as the United States Department of Agriculture. In consultation with State and Federal health authorities, no meat recalls are indicated.

Symptoms of *E. coli* 0157:H7 illness includes stomach cramps, which can be severe, and diarrhea. Diarrhea begins as loose, watery stools, with stools often turning bloody within 1-3 days. *E. coli* 0157:H7 disease sometimes leads to a serious complication called hemolytic uremic syndrome (HUS), which can include kidney failure.

Food safety is an important health consideration for the public. Even though the American food supply is one of the safest in the world, contaminated food causes millions of illnesses every year in this country.

Dr. Lundberg from the BCPH recommends the following precautions to reduce the risk of foodborne illness:

- Cook meat, poultry and eggs thoroughly. Using a thermometer to measure the internal temperature of meat ensures that it is cooked sufficiently to kill bacteria. Eggs should be cooked until the yolk is firm.
- Don't cross-contaminate one food with another. Avoid cross-contaminating foods by washing hands, utensils and cutting boards after they have been in contact with raw meat or poultry and before they touch another food. Always put cooked meat on a clean platter - never back on one that held the raw meat.

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MEAT TESTS POSITIVE FOR E. COLI – 2

- Promptly refrigerate leftover foods. Bacteria can grow quickly at room temperature, so refrigerate leftovers and other foods if they are not going to be eaten within two hours. Large volumes of food will cool more quickly if stored in several shallow containers for refrigeration.
- Wash produce. Thoroughly rinse fresh fruits and vegetables in running tap water to remove visible dirt. Rough-skinned melons should be scrubbed under running water. Remove and discard the outermost leaves of heads of lettuce or cabbage. Because bacteria can survive on the cut surface of fruits or vegetables, be careful not to contaminate these foods while slicing them on the cutting board. Avoid leaving cut produce at room temperature for many hours.
- Wash your hands with soap and water before preparing food. Don't be a source of foodborne illness. Avoid preparing food for others if you have diarrhea.

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Butte County Public Health Department

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