



**Commonwealth of Kentucky
Cabinet for Health and Family Services**

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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**Twenty *E. coli* Cases Linked to Illness Outbreak Across
Commonwealth**

Public Advised to Note Signs and Symptoms, Seek Follow-Up Care if Needed

FRANKFORT, KY (March 29, 2019) - The Kentucky Department for Public Health (DPH) announced today that 20 Kentuckians have tested positive with a strain of *E. coli* O103. Public health investigators have not yet identified the source of the outbreak, but have noted that some sort of food distribution is a likely mechanism for this outbreak among many of the individuals afflicted by the sometimes life-threatening bacteria.

The reported cases involve a number of children as well as adults, many of whom reside in Central Kentucky. No deaths linked to the outbreak have been reported but six people have been hospitalized.

Healthcare providers across the state have been notified of the outbreak and are advised to be alert for patients experiencing acute diarrheal illness, which could be associated with *E. coli*. Appropriate testing and investigative work will need to be completed to determine which cases are outbreak-associated. This is a particular strain

of *E. coli* that produces a type of toxin (Shiga toxin) that can be dangerous for those infected.

“Exposure to *E. coli* bacteria can be debilitating and potentially life-threatening, especially for small children and individuals with weakened immune systems. With this in mind, the Department for Public Health has taken swift action to identify patients, ensure appropriate testing, and follow up care as we work to determine the source of the outbreak,” said DPH Commissioner Dr. Jeff Howard. “Healthcare providers across Kentucky have been alerted to this potential threat and are working with us to make sure patients are identified and are receiving appropriate care. Meanwhile, we encourage all Kentuckians to be aware of the signs and symptoms of *E. coli* illness and to seek care if they are ill.”

Symptoms of *E. coli* O103 illness typically include stomach cramps and diarrhea, including bloody diarrhea, and people generally become ill two to five days after consuming contaminated food. *E. coli* O103 disease sometimes leads to hemolytic-uremic syndrome (HUS), a serious complication that can cause kidney failure and can occur a week or more after the onset of diarrhea. Those most at risk of developing complications from *E. coli* infection include the very young, the elderly, and people with weakened immune systems. State health officials are working with staff at local health departments in the counties with suspected or confirmed cases to determine the source of the infections.

The public can help prevent *E. coli* infections by;

- Washing hands frequently for at least 20 seconds with soap and warm water, especially before eating, after going to the bathroom, handling raw meat and eggs, and after handling or petting animals;
- Thoroughly washing produce before eating;
- Thoroughly cooking meat;
- Cleaning and sanitizing food preparation areas;
- Avoiding swallowing lake or pool water;

- Drinking only pasteurized milk;
- Frequently cleaning and sanitizing restrooms, including door knobs and faucets;
and
- Reporting diarrheal illnesses to your physician.

If you believe you have experienced symptoms of illness that could be associated with this *E. coli* outbreak, please consult your health care provider or your local health department.

-30-

The Cabinet for Health and Family Services is home to most of the state's human services and healthcare programs, including the Department for Medicaid Services, the Department for Community Based Services the Department for Public Health, the Department for Aging and Independent Living and the Department for Behavioral Health, Developmental and Intellectual Disabilities. CHFS is one of the largest agencies in state government, with nearly 8,000 full- and part-time employees located across the Commonwealth focused on improving the lives and health of Kentuckians.