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Press Release

COMMISSIONER'S OFFICE

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

No. 13-11

Feb. 19, 2013

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Salmonella Outbreak a Reminder to Properly Handle and Cook Poultry

(JUNEAU, AK) – An outbreak of Salmonella illnesses linked to chicken in Washington, Oregon and 10 other states is a reminder that all poultry products carry the risk of contamination. Preparing and cooking chicken properly makes it safe to eat.

Since June 2012, at least 94 people in Washington and Oregon have gotten sick due to a specific strain of Salmonella heidelberg. Alaska has had 11 illnesses caused by the outbreak strain during the same period. Fifteen people sickened in Washington were hospitalized; no deaths are known to be linked to this outbreak.

Salmonella is a common cause of foodborne illness, accounting for between 50 and 100 reported illness in Alaska each year, and likely many more unreported cases. There are many sources of Salmonella bacteria, but poultry is a common source. Salmonella in raw chicken is not limited to any one brand, and current U.S. Department of Agriculture regulations allow the sale of raw poultry that contains Salmonella, so any raw or undercooked chicken should be presumed to have potential bacterial contamination. In most cases of Salmonella illness, known as salmonellosis, a source is not identified.

Symptoms of Salmonella illness usually include diarrhea, fever and stomach cramps. The symptoms usually begin one to three days after exposure, and the illness usually lasts four to seven days. Most people recover without medical treatment. Serious infections can occur, particularly in the very young, the elderly and in people who have a weakened immune system. People who have severe symptoms such as bloody or long-lasting diarrhea should contact their health care provider.

Each year, hundreds of Alaska residents become sick due to food being prepared in an unsafe manner. Follow these precautions to help prevent foodborne illness from poultry:

- Keep raw poultry separate from other foods (especially fruits and vegetables) in your shopping cart, grocery bags, and refrigerator. Put poultry into a plastic bag to prevent drips that may contaminate other food.
- Be careful not to let drippings from poultry, packaging, cutting boards, or utensils, contaminate dishes or other surfaces in your kitchen. Cross-contamination can be a source of illness for anyone, even people who don't eat poultry.
- Be sure poultry is thawed before cooking. Frozen or partially frozen meat is easy to undercook.
- Cook poultry to 165°F.
- Always wash your hands after handling poultry.
- Use warm water, soap and paper towels for hands. Wash utensils with warm soapy water, rinse then apply a mild bleach (1 teaspoon bleach per gallon of water) solution to sanitize utensils, cutting surfaces, and countertops.

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention and the Alaska Section of Epidemiology are working with other agencies to track foodborne illnesses in our state. New cases of Salmonella infection, or any clusters of foodborne illness, should be reported to the Alaska Section of Epidemiology at 907-269-8000 or 800-478-0084.

For more information on food safety for Alaskans, visit DEC's website:
<http://dec.alaska.gov/eh/fss/index.htm>.

For more information on foodborne illnesses for Alaskans, visit the Section of Epidemiology's website at:
<http://www.epi.alaska.gov/id/dod/foodwater/default.htm>.

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