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No Reservations

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Salmonella Outbreak in Southwest U.S.

CDC: Salmonella Outbreak Has Sickened 50 People in 9 States

Raw tuna sushi could be the source

By James Andrews | May 18, 2015

At least 50 people in the southwestern U.S. have been sickened with a rare strain of *Salmonella* that has been associated with consumption of raw tuna sushi in several states, according to the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC). CDC said Monday that the agency is working with public health officials in nine states to investigate what it is now calling a multistate outbreak of *Salmonella Paratyphi B* variant L(+) tartrate(+).

The three main states known to be involved in the outbreak are California (29 cases from 6 counties as of May 15), Arizona (9 cases), and New Mexico (6 cases). A CDC spokesperson told **Food Safety News** that patients from the other six states traveled to the southwest, where they were most likely exposed to the outbreak strain.

Health officials in California, Arizona and New Mexico have said that many of the cases were connected to consumption of raw minced or ground tuna used in sushi.

The CDC spokesperson said that while many of the patients reported eating sushi, "the investigation has not conclusively identified a food source." Local and state health officials are continuing to interview patients to gather more information on the foods they ate in the week prior to their illnesses. Ten of 43 patients interviewed (23 percent) have been hospitalized.

Dr. Bob England, director of the Maricopa County Department of Public Health in Phoenix, said in a statement released on Friday that there were multiple restaurants involved in the outbreak. "That is strong evidence that the contamination is occurring before it gets to the restaurant," England said.

The outbreak strain of *Salmonella* does not cause typhoid fever or paratyphoid fever, CDC noted.

Food Safety News will continue covering this outbreak as more information comes to light.



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Pathogen Spotlight: Salmonella spp.

Salmonella spp.: Onsite time: 1 to 3 days, Duration of illness: 4 to 7 days

Food most commonly associated with the pathogen is poultry, eggs, dairy products and beef that are contaminated with the bacteria. It has also been found in RTE food such as produce that has come in contact with these animals or their waste.

The symptoms associated with Salmonellosis are diarrhea, abdominal cramps, vomiting, and fever.

The critical prevention measures are to reduce the bacteria in the food through cooking, especially poultry, to the required minimum internal temperatures (165°F for 15 seconds), and to prevent the transfer of the bacteria to food through cross contamination between raw poultry and ready-to-eat (RTE) food.



Food handlers diagnosed with Salmonellosis must be excluded from working in the establishment. *Note: Salmonella spp. is among the top five pathogens contributing to domestically acquired foodborne illness resulting in death.*

CDC, 2011 Estimates of Foodborne Illness in the United States

Mexican Restaurant, Los Angeles, CA. May 2015

Two California women are suing a Mexican restaurant, claiming they were both infected with *Salmonella* after meeting for lunch at the popular West Los Angeles Mexican restaurant.

The two women were not alone since numerous customers took to social media, including Yelp and Twitter, to spread the word about the March illnesses they blamed on the 33-year-old restaurant, which maintains an A rating from the Los Angeles County Public Health Department.

The two plaintiffs have filed a complaint in Los Angeles County Superior Court alleging violations of the California Retail Food Code, the state Sherman Food, Drug, and Cosmetic Laws, and the California Health and Safety Code. They also claim Breach of Implied Warranty Claims, Negligence, and Negligent Intentional Infliction of Emotional Distress.

In their complaint, filed by their attorneys, the women claim they were infected with *Salmonella* "as a result of consuming the defective and unreasonably dangerous subject product."
The women "suffered severe and continuing injuries," according to the complaint. They say the restaurant is "strictly liable because it manufactured and sold defective and unreasonably dangerous food."

The Los Angeles Department of Public Health followed up on the social media reports of illness on March 25, inspecting the restaurant and finding numerous violations. The department ordered the restaurant's management to immediately correct the violations, but allowed the restaurant to remain open.

Among the violations cited were failure to use food thermometers, inadequate ventilation and lighting, improper use of and storage of cleaning cloths used to clean service counters and other surfaces, unapproved use of equipment and utensils, storing potentially hazardous food at improper temperatures, and improperly sanitized food contact surfaces.

At least 11 of the Mexican restaurant's patrons reported being infected with *Salmonella*, including the two women. The two women believe the one menu item they both ate was salsa. One woman ate beef taquitos and rice, while the other dined on cheese enchilada and beans. They shared the chips and salsa commonly served upon arrival at a Mexican restaurant.

They both say they began experiencing symptoms commonly associated with *Salmonella*, the first woman within two days and the second woman within four days. Lab work at UCLA Health Centers confirmed the first woman's *Salmonella*, and Kaiser Permanente Panorama City Hospital found the second woman's sample positive for *Salmonella*, according to the complaint. The women say they have not fully recovered.
The Mexican restaurant has not commented on the lawsuit, which was filed May 15.

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