

**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE – April 18, 2017**

**Salmonella Outbreak Investigation Continues in Cole County**

In Missouri, there are over one hundred reportable diseases and conditions as specified in Missouri law (19 CSR 20-20.020). When a patient presents at a doctor’s office, clinic or hospital with one those diseases or conditions, the doctor and laboratory are mandated to report the condition to the local County Health Department. The County Health Department is responsible for monitoring disease occurrences and conducting an investigation to mitigate the spread of disease. When there is a sudden increase in occurrences of a disease in a particular time and place it is considered an outbreak.

When a foodborne disease outbreak is detected, public health and regulatory officials work quickly to collect as much information as possible to find out what is causing it, so they can take action to prevent more people from getting sick. Health officials will interview sick individuals while regulatory officials may inspect food establishments. Health officials assess all of the data together to try to find the likely source of the outbreak. They may take action, such as warning the public, when there is clear and convincing information linking illness to a contaminated food.

Health officials will compare client information to identify patterns in the geographic distribution of illnesses, the time periods when people got sick, and past outbreaks involving the same germ. They will also compare the foods or other exposures occurring more often in sick people than expected. They will look for clusters of unrelated sick people who ate at the same restaurant, shopped at the same grocery store, or attended the same event.

The environmental regulatory officials will try to identify a common point of contamination in the food distribution chain, identified by reviewing records collected from restaurants and stores where sick people ate or shopped. In addition, findings of food inspections are analyzed to identify food safety risks.

It is important to note that health officials do not solve every outbreak. Sometimes outbreaks end before enough information is gathered to identify the likely source. Many times, the suspected food item is gone and cannot be tested. Officials thoroughly investigate each outbreak, and they are constantly developing new ways to investigate and solve outbreaks faster.

*Salmonella* is one of the reportable diseases in Missouri. Most persons infected with Salmonella bacteria develop diarrhea, fever, and abdominal cramps 12 to 72 hours after infection. The illness usually lasts 4 to 7 days, and most persons recover without treatment. However, in some persons, the diarrhea may be so severe that the patient needs to be hospitalized.  If you have these symptoms and they are not getting better or you are starting to become dehydrated, please seek medical attention.

There are many different types of *Salmonella* and testing of a sick person’s stool is necessary to determine what type they have. Once the type of *Salmonella* is determined, Pulse-Field Gel Electrophoresis (PFGE) testing is performed to identify the specific fingerprint of the *Salmonella* strain. In Missouri, the Missouri Department of Health and Senior Services’ State Public Health Laboratory performs all these tests.

*Salmonella* is a fairly common stomach illness. People can get S*almonella* from consuming undercooked chicken or eggs, it can also be spread from live poultry and some other animals, like turtles and lizards. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention estimates that there were 1.2 million cases of *Salmonella* in the United States last year. There are most always three to five cases of *Salmonella* in Cole County at any given time.

The Cole County Health Department (CCHD) began to notice an increase in the number of *Salmonella* cases on April 12, 2017. On April 13th, CCHD reached out to the Infection Control staff at the hospitals to alert them about the issue. CCHD staff also consulted with the Missouri Department of Health and Senior Services to see if surrounding counties were also seeing an increase in *Salmonella* cases. So far, they are not. Over the last week, the number of cases in Cole County has continued to grow to twenty five. The sick individuals are being interviewed by staff to gather information about the foods they have eaten and if they have other risk factors, like handling baby chicks. As information from sick individuals was being compared, it was noted that several food establishments were named and some sick people did not eat at any food establishments.

CCHD has alerted City of Jefferson Environmental Public Health staff, who has jurisdiction over food establishments in Jefferson City, about food establishments that sick individuals have eaten at. The City of Jefferson Environmental Public Health staff investigated these leads to determine if safe food handling procedures are being followed in these food establishments.

At this point in the investigation, CCHD is continuing to interview sick persons and awaiting the PFGE results from the Missouri State Public Health Laboratory. The results from all the sick individuals will be compared to determine a pattern for disease transmission.

Foodborne illness outbreaks can be very complicated and take a long time to complete. The CCHD is working diligently to investigate this outbreak and prevent the spread of disease.

If you have any questions, please contact the Cole County Health Department at (573) 636-2181.