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Cooperative Extension  
Tulare County

Agriculture and Natural Resources



Prepared by: \_\_\_\_\_

## WASH CANTALOUPE BEFORE EATING

State Health Director Diana M. Bont, R.N., Dr. P.H. has advised consumers to always thoroughly wash the outer skin of a cantaloupe before cutting the fruit, following a multi state outbreak of Salmonella poisoning that has sickened at least 39 individuals in California, Oregon, New Mexico, Nevada and Washington.

Eating infected cantaloupe has been linked to at least 19 reported illnesses from an uncommon type of Salmonella, known as Salmonella Poona, in 13 California counties between April 14 and May 1. The illnesses include two cases each in Contra Costa, Los Angeles, San Diego, San Francisco, Santa Clara, and Solano counties and one each in Alameda, Amador, Butte, Fresno, Kern, San Luis Obispo and Santa Cruz counties. The usual number of cases of Salmonella Poona reported in California is fewer than four per month.

In California, all but five of the ill individuals were children 9 years old or under. At least six of the individuals were hospitalized; all have recovered. While most of the individuals ate melons that were purchased whole and cut at home, some ate pre-cut cantaloupes purchased from supermarkets or were served cantaloupes in restaurants. The location where the cantaloupes were grown, and the source of the contamination, are under investigation. Cantaloupe has been implicated in previous Salmonella outbreaks, including a multi state outbreak of more than 400 cases due to Salmonella Poona in 1991 and an outbreak in California of more than 20 cases due to Salmonella Saphra in 1997.

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Because cantaloupes are grown on the ground, their outer skin can become contaminated in the field by human or animal waste, or during distribution prior to sale. "Cantaloupe meat can become contaminated when it is sliced through contaminated rind without prior scrubbing with soap and hot, running water," Bont said. "Consumers should handle cantaloupe as they would handle raw meat: they should wash their hands before and after handling the fruit and refrigerate unused cut portions immediately. In fact, all fruits and vegetables that are not peeled should be washed." All produce that is cut should be stored promptly in the refrigerator.

Salmonella Poona causes the same kind of illnesses as other types of Salmonella. Symptoms, which include fever, abdominal cramps and diarrhea, generally occur one to three days after eating contaminated food and last two to five days. While most ill individuals recover without the need for medical attention, the infection can be life threatening to young children, the elderly and those with compromised immune systems.

Source: Christine Bruhn, Ph.D., U C Davis

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