



## DEPARTMENT OF PUBLIC HEALTH & HUMAN SERVICES

**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE: 7/26/24**

### **Update on *E. coli* O157 Outbreak Investigation**

The Flathead City-County Health Department (FCCHD) and the Montana Department of Public Health and Human Services (DPHHS) continue to work together to investigate an *E. coli* O157:H7 outbreak originating in Flathead County.

On July 25<sup>th</sup>, FCCHD and DPHHS received confirmatory testing results of clinical and food samples verifying ground beef as the exposure of concern. Specifically, the source of the outbreak was wagyu beef from one lot number. All cases reported eating undercooked or made-to-order burgers made with wagyu beef at one of multiple restaurants in Flathead County. The last known date of consumption was July 14, 2024.

The following restaurants are associated with the 14 cases of reported illness in this outbreak: Gunsight Saloon; Hops Downtown Grill; Tamarack Brewing Company; the Lodge at Whitefish Lake; and Harbor Grille. Furthermore, based on information provided through case investigation, one individual has died after exposure to wagyu beef consumed at Harbor Grille.

Patients associated with this outbreak were sickened with Shiga toxin-producing *E. coli* O157 which can be caused by a person eating raw or undercooked animal products contaminated with this strain of bacteria. Symptoms of this type of *E. coli* infection can include severe stomach cramps, bloody diarrhea, vomiting, fever, and chills. Young children, older adults, and people with weakened immune systems are at higher risk for severe illness. In severe cases, the infection can also trigger a serious condition called hemolytic uremic syndrome (HUS). According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), HUS can lead to kidney failure, permanent health conditions, and death. Symptoms of *E. coli* infection occur between one and ten days after exposure, with an average of three to four days after exposure. Individuals that may be experiencing these symptoms are encouraged to contact their healthcare provider.

Several other facilities—Flathead Fish, the Crawdad Café, and the Flathead Lake Lodge, received contaminated wagyu beef from the same lot number, but no reported illnesses have been associated with these establishments. Once the source of exposure was preliminarily identified, public health staff worked directly with affected businesses to ensure all remaining wagyu beef from the contaminated lot was removed from use. Samples of the suspected product were sent to the DPHHS Montana Public Health Laboratory for testing, which allowed for laboratory confirmation of the outbreak source. None of the contaminated beef remains in circulation and all businesses associated with this outbreak have been contacted directly.

“All restaurants involved in this outbreak investigation have been incredibly cooperative,” said Jennifer Rankosky, Health Officer of the Flathead City-County Health Department. “They were willing to assist us in our investigative efforts and they all voluntarily removed the wagyu beef once we were able to identify it as the source of concern.”

The Health Department encourages individuals to prevent foodborne illness by taking the following precautions:

- Cook ground beef and pork to a minimum internal temperature of 160°F (‘Well Done’). Do not eat rare or undercooked ground beef.
- Always carefully wash hands with soap and warm water after using the bathroom and changing diapers, and before handling or eating any food.



*Providing quality public health services to ensure the conditions for a healthy community.*





## Flathead City-County Health Department

[www.flatheadhealth.org](http://www.flatheadhealth.org)

- Always wash hands after contact with farm animals, animal feces, and animal environments.
- Wash raw fruits and vegetables before eating.
- Keep raw meat separate from produce and other foods when shopping for and storing groceries.
- Avoid unpasteurized beverages.

For more information about *E. coli* and illness prevention tips, visit <https://www.cdc.gov/ecoli/about/index.html>.