

Health Authorities Investigating *Salmonellosis* Outbreak

Texas Department of State Health Services (DSHS) officials said today that federal, state and local authorities are investigating a multi-state outbreak of the Saintpaul strain of the *Salmonella* bacteria. DSHS health officials have confirmed 21 cases in Texas since mid-April, including cases in Harris, Fort Bend, Dallas, Tarrant, Hays and Cameron counties. No deaths have been reported.

Health authorities say the investigation is in its early stages but that consumption of raw tomatoes has been implicated as the source of infections. Specific types and source of tomatoes remain under investigation.

Until the specific source of the illnesses is determined, health officials advise that:

- People with increased risk of severe infection including infants, the elderly and those with impaired immune systems not eat any raw Roma or full-sized round tomatoes other than those sold attached to the vine or grown at home.
- People who want to reduce their risk of *Salmonella* infection avoid eating raw Roma or full-sized round tomatoes other than those sold attached to the vine or grown at home.

Consumers also are advised to:

- Cook tomatoes at 145 degrees F. for at least 15 seconds to kill *Salmonella*.
- Avoid purchasing bruised or damaged tomatoes and discard any that appear spoiled.
- Thoroughly wash all tomatoes under running water.
- Refrigerate within two hours or discard cut, peeled or cooked tomatoes.
- Keep tomatoes that will be eaten raw separate from raw meats, raw seafood and other raw produce items.
- Wash cutting boards, dishes, utensils and counter tops with hot water and soap when switching between types of food products.
- Wash your hands thoroughly and often with soap and warm water especially after going to the restroom, before preparing or serving food and after changing a diaper.

Symptoms of *Salmonella* infection include headache, stomach pain, diarrhea, nausea and sometimes vomiting. The illness usually lasts 4 to 7 days, and most people recover without treatment. In some cases people with severe diarrhea may need to be hospitalized. People with symptoms should drink plenty of water, get extra rest and visit a doctor as soon as possible.