

## **CDC: Listeria, one of deadliest foodborne illness outbreaks in decades**

*By Michael Booth The Denver Post The Denver Post*

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The federal Centers for Disease Control and Prevention said Friday that 21 people have now died nationwide as a result of the listeria outbreak from Colorado cantaloupe.

The federal agency raised the toll from 18 in its previous count and said a total of 109 people have reported illnesses matching the characteristics of the outbreak.

Also Friday, the Food and Drug Administration announced a recall of mixed cut fruit including cantaloupe, packaged in many different ways by a New York prepared foods company. The recall by Fruit Fresh Up Inc. is related to the Colorado cantaloupe, the FDA said, and involves packages distributed in the Buffalo and upstate New York area.

The climbing toll makes the listeria outbreak, traced to the sole source of Jensen Farms cantaloupe near Holly, one of the deadliest foodborne illnesses in decades.

Listeria traced primarily to hot dogs and other prepared meats killed 21 Americans in 1998. The largest foodborne outbreak in decades was a 1985 listeria poisoning from Mexican-style unpasteurized cheese, which killed more than 40 people in the U.S.

The cantaloupe illnesses are expected to continue climbing, as the long incubation period after ingestion means sickness from listeria may appear through the end of October or later.

Federal and state authorities are still testing samples and asking questions in southern Colorado to pinpoint the exact cause of the listeria detected in the Jensen Farms cantaloupe, which was recalled nationwide on Sept. 14.

Thirty-two of the 109 illnesses in the current outbreak have been reported in Colorado, the largest total by far. Texas has reported 16 cases.

Of the 21 deaths, five were in Colorado; five in New Mexico; two each in Texas and Kansas; and one each in Indiana, Maryland, Missouri, Nebraska, New York, Oklahoma and Wyoming. The CDC also said one woman who was pregnant at the time of illness had a miscarriage.

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