



## SOUTHWEST PUBLIC HEALTH DISTRICT

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### New information helping disease investigators “close in” on E. coli source

Southwest Georgia Public Health District Health Director Dr. Jacqueline Grant said today that disease investigators have uncovered new clues that tainted beef may be the culprit behind an E. coli outbreak in Colquitt County that is continuing to sicken people.

“We believe we are closing in with new links to the meat and the restaurant,” Grant said.

She said disease investigators learned late Monday that the Barbecue Pit recently began purchasing meat from a new distributor, which said it has acquired meat from a supplier involved in a recent beef recall.

“Nebraska Beef, which is based in Omaha, Neb., has been identified as the supplier of ground beef products linked to E. coli illnesses in Michigan and central and northern Ohio. A distributor the Barbecue Pit recently started using has said it acquired meat from Nebraska Beef. We’re following that up and view it as a promising lead.”

In addition, she said, disease investigators are looking into new information that the fourth patient who has developed hemolytic uremic syndrome (HUS), a serious complication associated with E. coli infections, ate food prepared by the Barbecue Pit before falling ill. “If that is the case, then all the presumed cases of E. coli as well as all the confirmed cases will have been linked to the restaurant,” Grant said.

Another new development is that United States Department of Agriculture, the agency heading up the investigation into the meat supplied in the Michigan and Ohio E. coli outbreak, has now joined the Colquitt County disease probe, she said. “An investigator from the USDA met this morning with the restaurant owner and members of our team.”

The Barbecue Pit’s operators voluntarily closed July 3 to allow disease investigators full access after patients with confirmed diagnoses of Escherichia coli (E. coli) 0157 infections reported they had eaten there.

While no new cases of E. coli have been confirmed, people are continuing to seek treatment and specimens are continuing to be sent to the state laboratory for E. coli testing, said Grant. So far, there are eight lab-confirmed cases, four presumed cases and around a dozen results pending.

In addition, disease investigators are still awaiting lab results of samples taken from the restaurant on July 4.

People exposed to E. coli usually begin showing symptoms within three to four days, but the incubation period may be as short as one day or as long as 10 days. “Most people infected with this

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disease recover without treatment in five or six days,” said Grant. “Some people have mild symptoms or no symptoms, while others may experience severe symptoms.”

Symptoms of E. coli include stomach cramps, vomiting and diarrhea, which is often bloody. A complication known as hemolytic uremic syndrome (HUS) may develop in patients with severe E. coli infections. The Colquitt County disease cluster includes four patients with HUS, Grant said.

Grant emphasized that only a few of the people who ate at the Barbecue Pit (311 First Avenue SE) during the past month have gotten sick. “If you ate there recently and are not feeling sick, you need not go to the hospital or seek medical treatment,” Grant said.

People who are experiencing significant symptoms, such as bloody diarrhea, should avoid self-treatment with over-the-counter anti-diarrhea or anti-nausea medications, she said, adding, “You need to see your healthcare provider and have a culture done if you are having severe symptoms.”

The best way to prevent E. coli and other foodborne illnesses from spreading is with good hand-washing and food preparation practices. “Wash your hands thoroughly and frequently,” said Grant. “Avoid cross-contamination of counters, equipment and utensils when you are preparing raw meat and vegetables. Cook meat thoroughly and avoid unpasteurized juices and dairy products.”

More information about E. coli is available on-line at [www.southwestgeorgiapublichealth.org](http://www.southwestgeorgiapublichealth.org) or by calling your local county health department.

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