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Note: [Contact information for the Alaska Section of Epidemiology can be found at the end of this message.](#)

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Alaska Public Health Advisory

***Campylobacter* Outbreak Associated with Consumption of Raw Milk, May – June 2011**

The purpose of this Health Advisory is to provide information about a recent outbreak of *Campylobacter* infections associated with consuming raw milk. An Epidemiology *Bulletin* will be released in the coming week with additional details about the investigation.

What is *Campylobacter* and how do people become infected?

Campylobacter infection often causes acute gastroenteritis 2–5 days after exposure. For most persons, illness typically lasts about a week; however, for some persons, especially those with compromised immune systems, more severe symptoms (e.g., septicemia) can occur. Long-term sequelae, such as arthritis, can also occur and rarely, Guillain-Barré syndrome can develop several weeks after the onset of diarrhea. Most sporadic cases of *Campylobacter* infection are associated with eating raw or undercooked poultry meat or from cross-contamination of other foods by these items or by feces from an infected animal. The organism is not usually spread from one person to another, but this can happen if the infected person is producing a large volume of diarrhea.

What is the outbreak?

Campylobacter infections are reportable to the Alaska Section of Epidemiology (SOE) and the Alaska State Public Health Laboratory (ASPHL) performs subtyping of all *Campylobacter* isolates received. On June 15, 2011, ASPHL notified SOE of four *Campylobacter jejuni* isolates with identical pulsed-field gel electrophoresis (PFGE) patterns. This unique PFGE pattern had not otherwise been identified in Alaska in 2011. The four persons were interviewed about a wide range of exposures; consumption of raw milk from the same Southcentral cow-share program was the only exposure common to all ill persons.

What is being done with the cow-share program?

Alaska state regulations do not permit the sale of raw milk; however, owning shares of an animal to receive that animal's milk is permissible. Unlike milk supplied by commercial outlets, there is no testing or pasteurization required of milk before distribution from a cow-share program. Samples of milk taken from the farm in early May were positive for *Listeria*, another harmful bacteria. Additional milk and environmental samples were collected in June; laboratory results are pending.

Recommendations

1. Health care providers seeing patients with acute gastrointestinal illness who report consuming raw milk prior to illness should collect stool specimens for bacterial culture and submit samples to ASPHL for free testing; specimen collection guidelines are available at http://www.hss.state.ak.us/dph/labs/publications/image/Lab_Svcs_Manual.pdf
2. *Campylobacter* infection is reportable to public health by health care providers and laboratories (7 AAC 27.005). Please call 907-269-8000 to reach SOE staff Mon-Fri 8 AM-5PM. Confidential messages can be left at 907-561-1324 or 800-478-1700, if outside Anchorage.

Resources

Alaska DEH Fact Sheet on Dairy Shares, available at:

<http://www.dec.state.ak.us/eh/docs/vet/Fact%20Sheet%20Legal%20bounds%20of%20Cow,%20Goat%20or%20Sheep%20Shares%20in%20Alaska.PDF>

Real Raw Milk Facts, available at: <http://www.realrawmilkfacts.com/>

This message is sent to you as a service of the State of Alaska DHSS, Division of Public Health, through the Section of Epidemiology, 3601 C Street, Suite 540, Anchorage, Alaska 99503, (907) 269-8000. The Section of Epidemiology maintains a 24-hour Emergency Number, 1-800-478-0084. Internet site: <http://www.epi.Alaska.gov>.