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TUESDAY

Spinach sickens 114 in U.S.

One *E. coli* case confirmed in Illinois

By Michael Martinez
and Brendan McCarthy
Tribune staff reporters

The nation's contaminated spinach crisis touched its first person in Illinois, an elderly woman from north-central LaSalle County who has been hospitalized the past week with kidney failure, state public health officials said Monday.

The elderly and the young are especially vulnerable to kidney damage and even death after eating spinach contaminated with the virulent *E. coli*, officials say.

The woman fell ill in late August and has been diagnosed with Hemolytic Uremic Syndrome, said Melaney Arnold, a spokeswoman for the Illinois Department of Public Health. Arnold said the woman was in stable condition Monday, but that the food-borne illness could be life threatening.

The woman's name was not being released, Arnold said.

As of Monday, 114 people in 21 states have been sickened by contaminated spinach, including the Illinois case, officials said. An FDA official said 75 percent of those ill are women.

One person has died in Wisconsin, which is the state with the highest number of illnesses at 32, authorities said.

The figures are expected to peak by week's end because the Food and Drug Administration consumer advisory to avoid all fresh spinach was issued late last week and sickness from the tainted spinach occurs within seven days, said Dr. David Acheson, chief medical officer for the FDA's Center for Food Safety and Applied Nutrition.

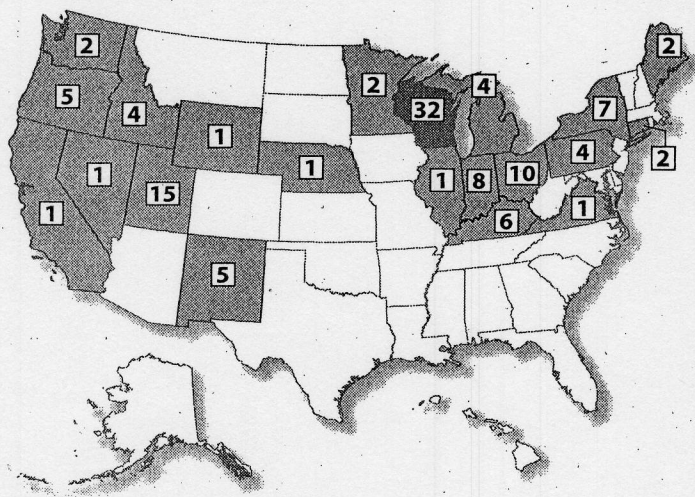
In Illinois, state officials learned of the woman's hospitalization within the last few days.

A hospital knew it had an *E. coli* case but did not know until recent days it was related to tainted spinach. A stool sample was tested at a state lab last weekend, Arnold said, and it was found to have contained the strain of *E. coli* that is related to spinach consumption. State health officials then advised the

E. coli outbreak reaches Illinois

Federal health officials said an outbreak of *E. coli* traced to bagged spinach has killed at least one person and sickened at least 113 others.

KEY: ■ At least one death ■ Confirmed case □ Cases



HOW *E. COLI* IS TRANSMITTED

■ *E. coli* lives in the intestines of cattle and other animals and typically is linked to contamination by fecal matter.

■ Sources of the bacterium include uncooked produce, raw milk, unpasteurized juice, contaminated water and meat.

Sources: Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, news reports

Associated Press

hospital and the woman of the result.

Officials said it is unclear where the woman purchased the tainted spinach. However, health department investigators have narrowed down the possibilities to a handful of grocery stores in the woman's town.

Local and state health officials said they have alerted every grocery store and restaurant in LaSalle County of the woman's illness.

"We want to ensure that the spinach product has been removed from shelves and dinner plates and has been properly disposed of," said Jenny Barrie, spokeswoman for the LaSalle County Health Department. "We have also contacted local hospitals to increase surveillance of all *E. coli* cases."

Any person who has developed diarrhea and has recently consumed fresh spinach or salad blends containing spinach should contact their health-care provider, she said.

The virulent strain of *E. coli* also causes bloody stools and in some cases can lead to death, health officials said. Most healthy adults can recover from

the illness in less than a week, however.

Federal authorities have been able to collect information on what sort of prepackaged spinach was eaten by about 40 of the 114 victims nationwide, and with information from the bags, authorities are able to trace which farm or farms originated the vegetable, Acheson said.

So far, California's Salinas Valley has been identified by authorities as one suspected region where the bad spinach originated, but officials haven't ruled out other parts of the country, Acheson said.

Federal investigators began their visits to Salinas Valley farms on Monday, he said.

So far, the bulk of evidence in the tainted spinach investigation points to Natural Selection Foods of San Juan Bautista, Calif., Acheson said.

On Monday, that firm issued a statement saying that federal and state authorities have cleared organic spinach, including its own, from any link so far to the outbreak; Acheson said no such clearance has been extended to organic spinach.

Natural Selection Foods has voluntarily recalled its pre-

Grocers stock other leafy greens

Associated Press

SAN FRANCISCO—Grocers said Monday they are working hard to offer alternatives to shoppers during a national recall of raw spinach because of an *E. coli* outbreak.

Whole Foods Market Inc., which is based in Austin, Texas, and has 186 stores nationwide, is featuring leafy greens like arugula, kale or mache.

"We have quite a group of shoppers who like their greens," said Kate Lowery, a Whole Foods spokeswoman. "I'd like to think of this as an opportunity until spinach gets back on track. You are going to turn on someone who wouldn't normally have an arugula salad."

Wild Oats, a grocer based in Boulder, Colo., that has 113 stores, will receive new bagged salad mixes on Tuesday or Wednesday that don't include spinach, spokeswoman Sonja Tuitele said.

The company will also be playing up "epicurean" greens with similar qualities to spinach, like red lettuce and baby romaine. "We can introduce consumers to some new and unique items they can't find in other stores," Tuitele said.

packaged spinach sold under several brand names, and another grower, River Ranch Fresh Foods of Salinas, Calif., is recalling its three spring mix blends because they contain baby spinach bought from Natural Selection.

Michael Martinez reported from San Juan Bautista, Calif., and Brendan McCarthy from Chicago.

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