

**ASTHO-NACCHO Foodborne Surveillance & Outbreak Response Workshop  
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Breakout Group Scenario 1**

***Officials Display Confusion as to Source of Listeria Outbreak; USDA Expands Warning to include Turkey Hot Dogs***

By Karen Robertson || March 3, 2006  
*The Atlanta Journal-Constitution*

Atlanta -- After an initial recall of deli turkey slices, federal officials gave mixed messages yesterday as to whether they truly know the source of the outbreak. State and federal health officials are still continuing their investigation as to the source of the large multi-state outbreak of Listeria that dates back to December and has now grown to 90 cases in 16 states. The outbreak was initially linked to deli turkey slices.

“Federal, state, and local health officials are continuing to investigate to determine the brand(s) and origin of the product involved,” the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention said in a statement released late yesterday. The CDC said from information they have on 78 cases, they all featured the same strain of Listeria, which indicates they are all related to the same outbreak.

Meanwhile, the USDA believes the source of the outbreak remains with Harrison Poultry. According to the U.S. Department of Agriculture's Food Safety and Inspection Service, the Portland, Oregon establishment is now voluntarily recalling approximately 381,623 pounds of cooked turkey products, mostly turkey hot dogs, that may be contaminated with Listeria monocytogenes. This is in addition to the recent voluntary recall of the approximately 250,000 pounds of the Lean Turkey Slices, which was the initial suspect source of the pathogen.

The confusion in messages from both federal agencies appears to be more of a safety precaution according to statements by several state health departments. “We are very confident as to the source of this outbreak,” said Samuel Jefferson a spokesperson for the Georgia Division of Public Health, “We are now making sure that the outbreak is limited to only these products from this establishment.” The Undersecretary for Food Safety at USDA echoed that sentiment. “We are coordinating closely with our sister agencies, the FDA and CDC, and our state and local partners to ensure public health protection through these recalls.”

The investigation of the outbreak began when Oregon officials noted cases in the greater Portland area around early January. There have been 90 cases throughout the nation: Georgia (12), Alabama (6), Mississippi (8), Virginia (3), Tennessee (5), Missouri (6), Florida (2), Iowa (3), Nebraska (6), Kansas (9), Colorado (3), West Virginia (3), Kentucky (4), Ohio (5), and Oregon (11). There were also 2 deaths related to this outbreak, one an elderly woman in Oregon and the other here in Georgia. In all other cases, the patients were hospitalized. It also turned out that a December case in Georgia, which wasn't initially believed to be a part of this outbreak, is also linked to this strain of Listeria.

Despite media efforts by governmental officials, consumers are still unclear as to the products that are being recalled. Jonathan Smith, who was shopping yesterday at the MaxMart in Decatur,

said he had no idea there was a health advisory until he came across a warning sign in the store's deli section. Following the federal government's warnings, MaxMart pulled all of its Harrison Poultry Turkey Products. Local health officials are working with retail establishments to make sure the recalled meat is quickly removed from the shelves. "Our job is to make sure that the public does not get exposed to the possibly contaminated meat," said Carolynn Waldorf, Director of the Dekalb County Health Department. "We're working with the information we have right now on hand to make sure that is done."

Nevertheless, federal officials are confident the peak of the outbreak has passed. "We are very hopeful that we will not see many new cases reported," the USDA Undersecretary said. "We will continue to work with industry and governmental partners to ensure all sources of the contaminated meat are neutralized."

Listeriosis is a type of food poisoning generated by the *Listeria monocytogenes* bacteria and is dangerous to the elderly, pregnant women, newborns, those with chronic medical conditions, people with HIV, or those undergoing chemotherapy. Most experience mild flu like symptoms—fever, muscle aches, nausea, or diarrhea. In serious cases, the disease spreads to the nervous system, causing headaches, stiff neck, and convulsions. In pregnant women, Listeriosis can result in miscarriage or stillbirth.

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#### Facts:

- Date: March 3, 2006
- 90 Listeriosis cases reported across 16 states, 2 deaths reported. Georgia (12, 1 death), Alabama (6), Mississippi (8), Virginia (3), Tennessee (5), Missouri (6), Florida (2), Iowa (3), Nebraska (6), Kansas (9), Colorado (3), West Virginia (3), Kentucky (4), Ohio (5), Oregon (11, 1 death), Oklahoma (2)
- One death was pregnant woman, another was elderly man.
- First case of *Listeria* was reported in late December in Georgia; however was not initially identified as a part of this outbreak strain until late January.
- A cluster of cases were reported in Oregon initially in early January (none since end of January).
- Initial investigation was on Lean Turkey Breast Slices made by Harrison Poultry of Portland, Ore.
- The USDA issued a recall for turkey slices on January 30, 2008.
- More cases of the Listeriosis were reported in February; CDC PulseNet confirmed they were the same strain as the earlier outbreaks.
- Majority of cases reported between Mid-January and Mid-February.
- Multi-state investigation now points to turkey hot dogs as second source of outbreak.
- USDA has expanded its recalls to include Harrison Turkey Franks and all other turkey products.
- USDA has said in the past that it had checked all of the machinery at the Harrison processing plant after the first outbreak source was identified.
- Press statement by CDC indicates investigation is "ongoing," media interpret this as a level of uncertainty to source of outbreak.