

## E. coli O157 Outbreak in Ontario & Quebec: Linked to Romaine Lettuce

**Attention:** Physicians, Long-Term Care Facilities, Retirement Homes, Emergency Departments, Infection Control Practitioners, Nurse Practitioners, Walk-In Clinics/Urgent Care Clinics, Family Health Teams, Central LHIN, NSM LHIN

**Date:** November 23, 2018

As of November 20, 2018, there have been 18 confirmed cases of *E. coli* O157 infection investigated in Ontario (3) and Quebec (15) with the same sub-typing. There have been no reported cases in Simcoe Muskoka linked to this outbreak to date. Individuals became sick between mid-October and early November 2018. Six individuals have been hospitalized, and one individual suffered from hemolytic-uremic syndrome (HUS). No deaths have been reported. Individuals who became ill are between 5 and 93 years of age. The majority of cases (56%) are female.

Most of the individuals who became sick in Ontario and Quebec **reported eating romaine lettuce** before their illnesses occurred. Individuals reported eating romaine lettuce at home, as well as in prepared salads purchased at grocery stores, or from menu items ordered at restaurants and fast food chains. As the risk is ongoing, the Public Health Agency of Canada is advising individuals in Ontario and Quebec to **avoid eating romaine lettuce and salad mixes containing romaine lettuce until more is known about the outbreak** and the cause of contamination.

### Implications for Health Care Providers

In light of this outbreak, a history of consuming romaine lettuce strengthens the possibility of *E. coli* O157 infection in those with compatible signs and symptoms. Further information about the clinical presentation of *E. coli* O157 can be found on the following websites:

- [Government of Canada](#)
- [SMDHU](#)

### E. coli O157 Clinical Course, Laboratory Testing and Treatment Information

The incubation period is about 2 – 10 days with a median of 3 – 4 days. The clinical hallmark is bloody diarrhea: in one study, 91% of *E. coli* O157 patients experienced bloody diarrhea at some point during their illness<sup>1</sup>. Other diagnostic clues include a blood leukocyte count of >10, severe abdominal pain and tenderness. HUS typically develops seven days (up to three weeks) after onset of diarrhea. **Stool samples can be sent for bacterial culture and the laboratory should be informed that *E. coli* O157 is suspected**

**Treatment is generally supportive, and antimicrobial therapy is generally not indicated for *E. coli* O157 infections because of a possible increased risk of hemolytic uremic syndrome.**

Health professionals play a critical role in identifying and reporting cases of *E. coli* O157 infection. If you have questions or want to report a case, please call the Simcoe Muskoka District Health Unit's Infectious Diseases Program at 705-721-7520 or 1-877-751-7520 Ext. 8809 Monday to Friday between 8:30 am - 4:30 pm.

**Note:** SMDHU has launched its **new interactive Reportable Disease Toolkit** which provides easier access to disease specific testing, treatment recommendations and patient and clinician resources. Available at: <http://www.smdhu.org/reportablediseaselist>

<sup>1</sup> <http://annals.org/aim/article-abstract/710410/escherichia-coli-o157-h7-diarrhea-united-states-clinical-epidemiologic-features>

