

HEALTH ADVISORY



Commonwealth Healthcare Corporation

Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands
1 Lower Navy Hill Road, Navy Hill, Saipan, MP 96950



December 4, 2019
2:50PM

CHCC-PR-20-031

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

“Consumers Warned to Avoid Romaine Lettuce Grown in Salinas, California”

On November 22, 2019, the US Department of Agriculture (USDA) Food Safety & Inspection Services (FSIS) issued Statewide Public Health Consumer Alert on mixed vegetable salad using Romaine Lettuce from Salinas, California. On November 26, 2019, the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) and Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) announced an ongoing investigation into an outbreak of illnesses caused by E. coli in the United States. Epidemiological, laboratory, and traceback evidence indicates that romaine lettuce from the Salinas California growing region is a likely source of this outbreak. **Therefore, the Commonwealth Healthcare Corporation (CHCC) is advising all consumers, retailers and restaurants not to consume, sell, or serve romaine lettuce harvested from Salinas, California.**

Consumers: Consumers should not eat fresh romaine lettuce and/or mixed salad harvested from Salinas, California. Romaine lettuce may be voluntarily labeled with a harvest region. If this voluntary label indicates that the romaine lettuce was grown in “Salinas” (whether alone or with the name of another location) do not eat it. Throw it away or return it to the place of purchase. If the romaine lettuce does not have information about its harvest region, it is recommended also to throw it away or return it to the place of purchase.

Restaurants and Retailers: Restaurants and retailers should not serve or sell romaine and/or mixed vegetable salad harvested from Salinas, California. If you do not know the source of your romaine lettuce, and if you cannot obtain that information from your supplier, you should not serve or sell it.

Suppliers and Distributors: Suppliers, distributors, and others in the supply chain should not ship or sell romaine harvested in Salinas, California. If the source of the romaine lettuce is unknown, you should not ship or sell the product at this time.

Currently, the FDA does not have enough traceback information to identify the specific source of the contamination that would allow us to request a targeted recall from specific growers. At this stage in the investigation, the most efficient way to ensure that contaminated romaine is off the market would be for the industry to voluntarily withdraw romaine products grown in Salinas, and to withhold distribution of Salinas romaine for the remainder of the growing season in Salinas.

At this time, romaine lettuce that was harvested outside of the Salinas region has not been implicated in this outbreak investigation. Hydroponically and greenhouse-grown romaine, which is voluntarily labeled

as “indoor grown,” from any region does not appear to be related to the current outbreak. There is no recommendation for consumers or retailers to avoid using romaine harvested from these other sources.

To report a notifiable disease or possible E.coli infection, the CHCC Epidemiology and Laboratory Capacity Program can be reached at surveillance@chcc.gov.mp or (670)234-8950, Monday-Friday from 7:30AM to 4:30PM.

To report a possible source of contaminated romaine lettuce (produce sold in stores or served in restaurants) please call CHCC Bureau of Environmental Health office at (670)664-4870/2/3, or email the BEH director, John Tagabuel, at john.tagabuel@dph.gov.mp.

For more information about CHCC programs, please follow us on Facebook and Twitter at @cnmichcc, check out our website at www.chcc.gov.mp or call us at (670) 234-8950.

This health advisory may be found online at <http://www.chcc.gov.mp/PressRelease.html>

CHCC Point of Contact:

Zoe Travis, *Communications and Public Relations Specialist*
(670) 234-8950 Ext. 3359, communications@chcc.gov.mp