



UNITED STATES
HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

ROSA L. DELAURO
3RD DISTRICT, CONNECTICUT

January 8, 2018

Brenda Fitzgerald, M.D.
Director
Centers for Disease Control and Prevention
1600 Clifton Road
Atlanta, GA 30329

Dear Dr. Fitzgerald:

I continue to be deeply alarmed by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention's (CDC) response to the recent multistate outbreak of *E. coli*. CDC confirmed the outbreak on December 28 – almost a month and a half after the first infection. As with any food safety threat, foodborne illness represents a grave risk to the health and wellbeing of consumers across our nation, particularly children and the elderly. American families deserve a safe national food supply, and they also have a right to know when their food may be putting them at risk. Therefore, I urge the Agency to immediately release all information and data related to the current outbreak, and to act with greater transparency when addressing future threats to public health.

Preliminary testing has shown the *E. coli* strain behind the US outbreak to be a “virtual genetic match” to a similar outbreak in Canada.¹ This genetic similarity suggests that the US and Canadian outbreaks may share the same source. However, there is a stark difference in how the Public Health Agency of Canada has handled the outbreak. The Canadian agency first released a Public Health Notice on December 11, which explained the outbreak, provided an investigation summary, and outlined symptoms and treatment options for *E. coli* infection.² This Public Health Notice was subsequently updated three times on December 14, 21, and 28.³ Additionally, full epidemiological information regarding the outbreak is publicly available on the government's website.⁴ In contrast, CDC has provided no information on its website, other than a media statement on December 28.

¹ <https://www.consumerreports.org/food-safety/avoid-romaine-lettuce-for-now/>

² <https://www.canada.ca/en/public-health/services/public-health-notices/2017/public-health-notice-outbreak-e-coli-infections-linked-romaine-lettuce.html>

³ *ibid.*

⁴ <https://www.canada.ca/en/public-health/services/public-health-notices/2017/public-health-notice-outbreak-e-coli-infections-linked-romaine-lettuce/epidemiological-information-outbreak-ecoli-infections-linked-romaine-lettuce.html>

CDC's stunning lack of guidance to consumers regarding this outbreak is unconscionable. Across the US and Canada, this outbreak is responsible for 58 infections, 22 hospitalizations and two deaths. Despite this, CDC failed to provide consumers with warnings or updated information on how to best protect their own health. Just as concerning, the investigation appears to have gone "cold," with the Agency's own staff seemingly content with ending the investigation without ever finding the cause and source.

When it comes to food safety, American consumers deserve more than this slow and insufficient response. While I appreciate the CDC's diligence in providing a briefing for my staff, I believe you need to ensure that all information regarding the current outbreak is publicly available and accessible. As such, I request that you provide the following information:

1. What is the current status of both the US *E. coli* outbreak and CDC's investigation?
2. When was the first *E. coli* infection, associated with the US outbreak, reported to CDC?
3. Following reported illnesses, when did CDC initially begin investigating the US outbreak?
4. What is CDC's justification for waiting almost a month and a half before publicly confirming the outbreak?
5. To what degree has the CDC collaborated with the Public Health Agency of Canada regarding both countries' investigations and the data from illnesses in Canada?
6. What information does CDC currently have regarding the source of the outbreak, and what information exists on implicated suppliers, distributors or retailers of contaminated food products?

Families from coast to coast have been affected by this most recent outbreak, and many more are now left wondering if the food they are eating is safe. It is vitally important that the CDC – the world's preeminent public health organization – completes a thorough investigation while also providing timely, public information.

Thank you for your work on this important matter, and I look forward to your written response.

Sincerely,



Rosa L. DeLauro
Member of Congress