

## AT LEAST 31 DEATHS FROM E. COLI O104:H4 IN GERMANY LINKED TO SPROUTS

Over 3,000 illnesses including 795 cases of kidney failure in one of largest outbreaks in history



After weeks of investigation, German health authorities said on June 10, 2011 that "it is the sprouts"

Authorities in Germany recommend to avoid eating sprouts; health advisories on raw lettuce, tomatoes, and cucumbers have been lifted.

Even though testing of sprouts from the implicated farm have not shown the outbreak strain, epidemiology links the illnesses to eating sprouts.

Raw sprouts have been linked to at least 55 outbreaks of foodborne illness since 1988.

Illness associated with fresh sprouts can come from contaminated seed, water, soil or poor hygiene.

The largest foodborne illness outbreak Germany has ever experienced began in early May, and sick people particularly those suffering from hemolytic uremic syndrome (which leads to kidney failure) are still being reported. *E. coli* O104:H4, causes disease similar to the more common O157:H7 serotype. This strain appears to be especially dangerous and has led to more deaths and hospitalizations than usually seen with a pathogenic *E. coli* outbreak.

The majority of cases are reported in Northern Germany, but there have been illnesses reported in the U.K., U.S., Canada, Austria, Denmark,

Norway, Switzerland, Sweden, Spain, France, and the Netherlands. With the exception of only 2 cases, all those affected had recently visited Germany.

The source of the outbreak has been difficult to determine as indicators and pathogens have been found on many of the foods that have been investigated, but the outbreak strain has not been found. Epidemiological evidence released by

German health authorities on June 10th point to sprouts as the source.

