



Nebraska Department of Health and Human Services  
**HEALTH ALERT NETWORK**  
Update

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DEPT. OF HEALTH AND HUMAN SERVICES



DATE: November 20, 2019

TO: Healthcare Providers and Public Health

RE: **Hepatitis A Outbreak Linked to Fresh Blackberries Purchased at Fresh Thyme Grocery Stores from September 9-30, 2019**

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## Background

This message updates the previous Health Alert Network message sent to Nebraska health care providers on November 8<sup>th</sup> and again on November 19<sup>th</sup> due to a system error. The Nebraska Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS), Nebraska local health departments, U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA), and the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) are investigating a multistate outbreak of hepatitis A illnesses in Nebraska, Indiana, and Wisconsin linked to fresh, non-organic blackberries from Fresh Thyme grocery stores.

Currently, there are eleven confirmed cases in three states (Nebraska, Indiana, and Wisconsin). Of these, six are residents of Nebraska (Douglas County, Three Rivers Public Health Jurisdiction, and Central District Health Jurisdiction). Illness onsets ranged from October 15-November 5, 2019. Four cases in Nebraska were hospitalized and later released, and there are no reported deaths. The suspected source of illness for all cases is fresh blackberries purchased at Fresh Thyme grocery stores from September 9-30, 2019.

Based on the epidemiological information collected in the investigation, all ill patients reported consuming fresh blackberries purchased from September 9-30 at Fresh Thyme stores in three states: Indiana, Nebraska, and Wisconsin. Preliminary trace back information shows that fresh blackberries were shipped to Fresh Thyme stores in 11 states: IA, IL, KY, MI, MO, MN, NE, OH, PA, and WI. The blackberries were on sale and it is possible that consumers purchased large quantities fresh and froze some product for later consumption. **The FDA is urging consumers to not eat any remaining blackberries purchased fresh at any Fresh Thyme stores from September 9-30, 2019. Nebraska DHHS is interested in testing any of these blackberries that are frozen and still available.**

## Post-Exposure Prophylaxis Recommendations

If consumers purchased fresh blackberries from Fresh Thyme stores in the 11 states listed above from September 9-30, ate those blackberries in the last two weeks, and have not been vaccinated for hepatitis A, post-exposure prophylaxis (PEP) is

recommended. PEP is not recommended if given longer than two weeks after exposure. Those with evidence of previous hepatitis A vaccination or previous hepatitis A infection do not require PEP.

The Advisory Committee on Immunization Practices (ACIP) updated its post-exposure prophylaxis recommendations in 2018 (<https://www.cdc.gov/mmwr/volumes/67/wr/mm6743a5.htm>). **Hepatitis A vaccine is now recommended for all immunocompetent persons aged 12 months and older for post-exposure prophylaxis.** Immunoglobulin may also be considered for people who are immunocompromised or have chronic liver disease.

### **Diagnosis and testing**

Please consider Hepatitis A in patients with compatible symptoms, order HAV IgM serology testing for all suspected cases through commercial laboratories, and notify your local health department of any suspected cases.

Individuals are considered most contagious during the 2 weeks before and 1 week after onset of jaundice. Food handlers with hepatitis A should not handle food for at least 1 week after onset of jaundice or 2 weeks for symptoms other than jaundice.

### **Reporting Cases**

All hepatitis A cases should be reported to public health. To report cases or for additional information, contact your local health departments at <http://dhhs.ne.gov/Pages/Local-Health-Departments.aspx>:  
Douglas County Health Department (402-444-7214)  
Three Rivers Public Health Department (402-727-5396)  
Central District Health Department (308-385-5181)  
Nebraska DHHS Blake Hendrickson (402-471-6450)

Additional information on the FDA's food safety alert related to this outbreak is available at: <https://www.fda.gov/food/outbreaks-foodborne-illness/outbreak-investigation-hepatitis-potentially-linked-fresh-conventional-blackberries-fresh-thyme>

Additional information on Hepatitis A is available at: <http://www.cdc.gov/hepatitis/HAV/index.htm>

