

Salmonella Saintpaul Outbreak

[Announcer] This podcast is presented by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. CDC- safer, healthier people.

[Dr. Robert Gaynes] I'm Dr. Robert Gaynes with CDC. Joining us today is Dr. Samir Sodha, Medical Epidemiologist with CDC's Division of Foodborne, Bacterial, and Mycotic Diseases. Dr. Sodha is here to talk about the multistate *Salmonella* Saintpaul outbreak. Welcome to the show, Samir.

[Dr. Samir Sodha] Thanks for having me, Bob.

[Dr. Gaynes] This outbreak went on for some time and was quite large. How does it compare to previous foodborne outbreaks?

[Dr. Sodha] This outbreak has been one of the largest outbreaks of *Salmonella* infections ever in the United States, and it's the largest foodborne outbreak in the last 10 years.

[Dr. Gaynes] So, how big was it?

[Dr. Sodha] Well, over 1,400 people who were sick got tested and were found to have the outbreak strain of *Salmonella*; over 270 of them were hospitalized. The *Salmonella* infection might have contributed to the deaths of 2 of these people. All together, people in 43 states, D.C., and Canada were infected. It's likely that there were many thousands more who were ill but did not get tested.

[Dr. Gaynes] Well, with such a large outbreak, I imagine it must have been difficult to investigate.

[Dr. Sodha] Oh yes it is, Bob. A large multistate outbreak such as this can be quite challenging. But, being able to work with our public health partners helped tremendously.

[Dr. Gaynes] Which public health partners did you work with?

[Dr. Sodha] CDC worked with state, local, and tribal health departments, the Indian Health Service, and the Food and Drug Administration, or FDA. Together, we conducted a number of studies to find the source of the outbreak.

[Dr. Gaynes] Samir, can you tell us a little bit about how you do these studies?

[Dr. Sodha] Sure, Bob. In this outbreak, state and local health officials and the CDC interviewed sick people and well people about what they'd eaten. Then, we compared their answers to determine which foods were eaten more often by those who got sick, compared to those who weren't sick. Also, FDA investigated the distribution path of foods as far back as the farms on which they were grown. In addition, FDA, states, and the CDC tested many foods and specimens from farms and warehouses for contamination.

[Dr. Gaynes] Oh, it sounds like a lot of work went into the investigations. What did you learn?

[Dr. Sodha] Well, the investigations showed that more than one produce item had been contaminated, either on the farms or during processing and distribution. The outbreak strain of *Salmonella* Saintpaul was found in a sample of jalapeño peppers at a warehouse in Texas. These contaminated peppers came from Mexico. FDA and Mexican authorities visited farms in Mexico that provided produce to this warehouse and FDA found the outbreak strain in a serrano pepper and a water source used for crop irrigation at one farm. So we now know that jalapeño peppers were a major cause of this outbreak, serrano peppers were also a source, and tomatoes were possibly a source, especially early in the outbreak.

[Dr. Gaynes] Are investigations still ongoing?

[Dr. Sodha] The outbreak appears to be over. However, public health officials are still analyzing data gathered during the investigation.

[Dr. Gaynes] Samir, where can listeners get more information about the *Salmonella* Saintpaul outbreak?

[Dr. Sodha] Bob, they can get more information at www.cdc.gov/salmonella/saintpaul and at www.fda.gov.

[Dr. Gaynes] Thank you, Samir.

[Dr. Sodha] Thanks, Bob.

[Announcer] For the most accurate health information, visit www.cdc.gov or call 1-800-CDC-INFO, 24/7.