



NEWS RELEASE

Defense Commissary Agency

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Food safety notice: tomatoes, cucumbers, lettuce

By DeCA Office of Communication

NOTE: *This version corrects the description of the E. coli outbreak – it is considered a variant strain. It also clarifies what measures DeCA is taking to adjust its supply sources for tomatoes, cucumbers and lettuce for its commissaries in Europe. And, it updates the number of people killed and sickened to date by this outbreak.*

FORT LEE, Va. – Military commissaries in Europe are not selling or receiving lettuce, tomatoes and cucumbers from any European sources until further notice, according to an advisory from the U.S. Public Health Command Region-Europe.

The medical command delivered its advisory in the face of the current E. coli outbreak in Germany. The outbreak is attributed to a variant strain of E. coli that has reportedly killed more than 20 people and sickened more than 2,500 people, according to various press reports. Germany is the country hit hardest by this outbreak.

Researchers have thus far been unable to pinpoint the cause of the illness, though experts are investigating possible links to specific varieties of produce, mainly focusing on cucumbers, tomatoes and lettuce.

U.S. Public Health Command Region-Europe officials are advising consumers that cleaning raw vegetables may not guarantee they are free of infection. Medical officials say as always “there is a higher risk of illness associated with eating raw vegetables.” Experts are recommending that all vegetables procured in Europe be cooked and not eaten raw until the source of this outbreak is identified. Fruits are not affected by this outbreak.

For commissary customers in Europe, the ban on local produce will affect the availability of product, said Chris Wicker, public health advisor for the Defense Commissary Agency’s health and safety directorate. DeCA is looking into alternative supply sources and had tripled its order of bagged salads and lettuces from the United States to augment many of its commissaries in Europe.

“A disruption in supplies will be inevitable, but we are trying to minimize the adverse impact to our customers as much as possible,” Wicker said.

The following information about E. coli comes from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention website,

http://www.cdc.gov/nczved/divisions/dfbmd/diseases/ecoli_o157h7/index.html:

Escherichia coli – abbreviated as E. coli – are a large and diverse group of bacteria. Although most strains of E. coli are harmless, others can make you sick. Some kinds of E. coli can cause diarrhea, while others cause urinary tract infections, respiratory illness and pneumonia, and other illnesses. People of any age can become infected. Very young children and the elderly are more likely to develop severe illness and hemolytic uremic syndrome than others, but even healthy older children and young adults can become seriously ill. Persons with HUS should be hospitalized because their kidneys may stop working and they may develop other serious problems. Most persons with HUS recover within a few weeks, but some suffer permanent damage or die.

For more information on the outbreak, please refer to this link:

http://www.rki.de/cln_169/nm_217400/EN/Home/results_stec.html. For the latest food-safety alerts and product recalls affecting military commissaries, visit:

http://www.commissaries.com/press_room/press_release/breaking_news_07/index.cfm - the “Food & Product Recalls” link. For general food-safety information, visit DeCA’s official website, choose the “News & Info” tab and select “Food Safety” from the drop-down box.

-DeCA-

About DeCA: *The Defense Commissary Agency operates a worldwide chain of commissaries providing groceries to military personnel, retirees and their families in a safe and secure shopping environment. Authorized patrons purchase items at cost plus a 5-percent surcharge, which covers the costs of building new commissaries and modernizing existing ones. Shoppers save an average of more than 30 percent on their purchases compared to commercial prices – savings amounting to thousands of dollars annually. For current savings figures for various groups – single member up to a family of seven – visit <http://www.commissaries.com>. A core military family support element, and a valued part of military pay and benefits, commissaries contribute to family readiness, enhance the quality of life for America’s military and their families, and help recruit and retain the best and brightest men and women to serve their country.*