

E. coli tied to Costco more dangerous than Chipotle outbreak

By **DONNA GORDON BLANKINSHIP**
Associated Press

SEATTLE — The strain of E. coli linked to Costco chicken salad that sickened 19 people in seven states is more likely to be life-threatening than a recent outbreak that closed some Chipotle restaurants in the Northwest.

Health officials urged people who bought chicken salad at any U.S. Costco store on or before Friday to throw it away, even if no one has gotten sick.

The strain of Shiga toxin-producing E. coli can be life-threatening, but no deaths have been reported. Five people have been hospitalized and two have developed a type of kidney failure, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention said.

The CDC and state health officials were investigating and have not yet determined what ingredient in the rotisserie chicken salad made and sold in Costco Wholesale stores could be the source of the outbreak.

Six people have fallen ill in Montana, five in Utah, four in Colorado, and one each in California, Missouri, Virginia and Washington state. The CDC said the illness reports began on Oct. 6 and involved people from age 5 to 84.

The illnesses are not related to a recent E. coli outbreak tied to Chipotle that sickened more than 40 people. Chipotle voluntarily closed 43 restaurants in Washington and Oregon and reopened them after deep cleaning and ordering new ingredients.

The strain linked to the Mexican food chain was identified as E. coli 026, while the one tied to Costco is E. coli 157, which the CDC said is more likely to be harmful, especially in young children.

A call to Costco headquarters in Washington state seeking comment was not immediately returned.

US traffic deaths spike sharply this year

By **TOM KRISHER**
AP Auto Writer

DETROIT — After declining for most of the past decade, traffic deaths spiked 8 percent in the first half of this year, prompting a call from the nation's highway safety chief to find ways to reduce the human errors that cause most fatalities.

The new estimate released Tuesday by the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration comes just as millions of Americans prepare to hit the road for the Thanksgiving holiday. AAA predicts that 42 million people will drive 50 miles or more over the coming weekend.

Officials released a final number of fatal crashes for 2014, which showed a decline of 0.1 percent. This year, lower gas prices and an improving economy are prompting people to travel more. Americans drove 1.54 trillion miles in the first half of 2015, up 3.5 percent from the same period in 2014, according to the Federal Highway Administration.

But safety administration Administrator Mark Rosekind said that not all of the increase could be attributed to people driving more miles. He suspects that texting and other distractions while using smartphones was part of the cause, as well as drunken, drugged and drowsy driving, and increased driving by teenagers. The safety administration, he said, doesn't have clear enough data yet to pinpoint exact causes.

"These numbers are a wake-up call," Rosekind said of the increase. He urged people to stop using their phones while driving, not to drink alcohol or use drugs and get behind the wheel, and to wear seat belts and motorcycle helmets.

Highway Traffic Safety Administration said its research shows that human decisions cause 94 percent of all crashes. The agency plans to hold five meetings around the country early next year to get input on how to cut traffic deaths, followed by a larger meeting in Washington that would yield recommendations to address the human factor.



Mike Groll/AP Photo/File

Government estimates show U.S. traffic deaths rose 8 percent for the first six months of 2015, following a slight decrease in 2014, according to a report released Tuesday by the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration.

"It is important for Americans to know that human behaviors are by far the largest cause of fatalities," Rosekind said.

Rosekind said 2014 statistics show that distracted driving caused about 10 percent of the 32,675 traffic deaths that year. But he said that since driver distraction is difficult to track, "that our numbers underestimated exactly what's going on out there."

The slight drop in 2014 traffic deaths came after a decade that saw a 25 percent decline due to fewer miles driven, safer cars and public awareness of the dangers of drunken driving.

For 2014, the rate of fatalities fell to a record low of 1.07 deaths per million vehicle miles traveled. But Rosekind said 2015 estimates showed the death rate rising over 4 percent, which he called "troubling."

The safety administration's numbers showed that 2014 was the safest year on record for people inside vehicles, with 21,022 deaths reported. Nearly half of those killed were not wearing seat belts, even though belt use rose to 87 percent, Rosekind said.

Bicyclist deaths declined 2.3 percent last year, but pedestrian fatalities rose 3.1 percent over 2013. Both appear to be rising slightly this year, Rosekind said.

Drunken driving continued to cause about one-third of all traffic deaths in 2014, with 9,967 people killed.

The safety agency will hold meetings in February and March in Sacramento, California; Boston; Denver; Atlanta and Dallas-Fort Worth to get input. After that, safety experts will meet in Washington, D.C., to come up with an action plan, Rosekind said.

The plan will focus on human errors or choices that cause crashes, Rosekind said, adding that there is excitement over new technologies that can prevent some of those mistakes.

Three shopping trends for this year's holiday season

By **ANNE D'INNOCENZIO**
AP Retail Writer

NEW YORK — The holiday season is upon us. Here's what shoppers can expect if they're heading out to stores at any point during the holiday shopping season:

No fighting over must-have gifts

Yet again, trend experts say there's no single item that's emerging as a must-have for the holiday season.

Sure, in the world of toys, anything "Star Wars" is faring well as well as a slew of robotic pets like robotic toy bears from Mattel's Fisher-Price and an interactive unicorn from Hasbro. But there's no runaway hit.

In fashion, jeans are making a comeback this holiday season, which should help perk up teen retailers' business, and athletic-inspired cloth-

ing like yoga pants remain popular. But overall, there's nothing that's making shoppers run to stores.

"You have a democratic influence. Nobody dictates trends," said William Taubman, chief operating officer at Taubman Centers Inc., which operates more than 20 malls in the U.S.

It'll be cheap to stay warm

Heavy sweaters and winter coats are piling up at department stores and specialty chains heading into the Black Friday weekend.

Unseasonably warm weather and a shift in changing shopping habits toward experiences like spas have limited shoppers' appetite for such clothing. So plenty of stores like Macy's, Nordstrom and Dick's Sporting Goods say they plan to further mark down excess goods.

Tom Clarke, managing director at AlixPartners and co-head of the retail practice, expects retailers will step

up discounting this weekend beyond what's planned to take advantage of the crowds in the stores.

That's good news for shoppers, but bad news for stores whose profit margins will be squeezed. In fact, fourth-quarter profits are expected to be up 1.4 percent on average for the 119 retailers Retail Metrics LLC tracks. That's down from the anticipated 3.7 percent growth just a month ago.

But many are left with no choice but to discount.

As Macy's CEO Terry Lundgren recently told analysts: "We're not selling lumber so I can't carry the lumber over to 2016 and sell it at the same price next year. We're selling fashion apparel, so we're going to mark that inventory down."

Toys will be pricey

Prices are climbing for toys as manufacturers pack lots of technology into

them. Deborah Weinswig of the Fung Business Intelligence Center says in a recent report that prices of what the company considers the top 20 expected toys was nearly 36 percent higher than last year, with the average price of \$64.99.

And there are plenty of toys that cost \$100 or more, observed Toys R Us CEO Dave Brandon. He cited Fisher-Price's Smart Bear, which has a suggested price of \$99.99, as an example.

Jim Silver, editor-in-chief of TTPM, an online toy review site, says there's a limited selling window for the pricier toys. Parents save the most expensive ones as gifts and buy them in December.

Bryant Feliz, the father of a five-year-old girl, says he likes the diverse assortment of toys in the stores, but he doesn't like the prices.

"At what costs should we be paying for our own kids' enjoyment?" he said.

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