

# E. Coli Outbreak Kills 14 in Germany



Image Caption: A woman buys cucumbers at a market in El Alquian, Almeria, in southeastern Spain, May 29, 2011

A deadly form of *E. coli* bacteria, reportedly linked to Spanish cucumber exports, has killed at least 14 people in Germany and sickened hundreds more in what experts are saying is the one of the biggest outbreaks of the kind worldwide. German experts and government officials gathered Monday for a meeting to address the crisis. Health officials from several European countries including Germany, Austria and Russia pulled Spanish vegetables from sale and blocked additional imports out of concern the outbreak could spread. Spain lashed out against the ban. Diego Lopez Garrido, Spain's EU representative, said there is no proof that the contamination originated in Spain. Germany's national disease institute advised people in northern Germany, where most cases have occurred, not to eat raw tomatoes, cucumbers and lettuce. The European Center for Disease Prevention and Control is investigating the source and scope of the risk. The Stockholm-based group said infected patients developed hemolytic uremic syndrome [HUS], a potentially fatal condition afflicting the kidneys, blood and central nervous system. According to the European health officials, the outbreak is one of the largest worldwide, and the biggest ever reported in Germany. Most of the outbreak has been in Hamburg, but cases of HUS also have been reported in Sweden, Denmark, the Netherlands and Britain. Spanish Environment Minister Rosa Aguilar said last week that it is too early to know where the contamination took place. The European disease center, an EU agency, said authorities in Hamburg found *E. coli* bacteria last week on two samples of Spanish cucumbers, but it was not clear whether they were contaminated at the source or during delivery.

## More die from tainted Spanish cucumbers

Posted May 29, 2011 06:45:00

<http://www.abc.net.au/news/stories/2011/05/29/3229819.htm>



**PHOTO:** Spain has sanctioned several cucumber growers.

### **German health chiefs have announced four more deaths feared to have been caused by E. coli-contaminated cucumbers, bringing to 10 the number of suspected deaths in the country.**

Two of the 10 deaths have so far been officially attributed to the deadly E. coli strain, with about 300 cases of infection reported in several countries in the past week

The four new deaths in north Germany were announced by the health ministry of Schleswig-Holstein state and a clinic in Hamburg. The victims were three women in their 80s and a fourth in her 30s.

Authorities in southern Spain said on Saturday (local time) they had introduced restrictions on two distributors suspected of exporting cucumbers tainted with the bacteria that causes the potentially fatal haemolytic uraemic syndrome (HUS).

The regional council of Andalusia said suspect batches of cucumbers had been withdrawn, pending laboratory checks.

The European Commission said earlier that Spain had suspended the activities of two distributors in the southern provinces of Almeria and Malaga, but spokesman Frederic Vincent confirmed on Saturday that only the greenhouses where the suspect cucumbers had been grown were affected.

"We don't know where the contamination occurred, whether on the (Spanish) sites or along the distribution chain," he said.

A probe was launched and samples taken from the soil, water and products from the two agricultural sites, the European Union's executive arm said Friday.

The cucumbers are suspected to have been contaminated by the enterohaemorrhagic E. coli strain.

"Investigations are ongoing to identify other potential sources, while a third suspect batch of cucumbers originating either in the Netherlands or in Denmark, and traded in Germany, is also under investigation," it said.

A suspect consignment of Spanish cucumbers was distributed to Denmark, but authorities there traced the vegetables and withdrew them from the market, the statement said.

The Andalusian authorities said on Saturday that exhaustive checks by the Malaga company on its cucumbers had shown them totally free of contamination.

"Nevertheless we decided to suspend the product as a preventive measure," a statement added.

In the other company, at Roquetas del Mar, a consignment had been identified with some difficulty, it said.

Samples from suspect batches had been sent to a laboratory in the north-west province of Galicia for testing.

### **Dropped on the ground**

Meanwhile the Spanish daily El Pais said the Malaga growers, Frunet Bio, had been advised from Germany four days after the dispatch of a consignment on May 12 that their cucumbers had been dropped on the ground in a Hamburg market.

"We have that in writing," it quoted a spokesman for Frunet Bio as saying on Saturday. "When that happens we can no longer guarantee the product."

The Eppendorf clinic near Hamburg, which recorded two of Saturday's deaths, said it had introduced a new treatment with an antibody aimed at countering kidney damage, but would not know for several weeks if it worked.

Germany has confirmed 276 cases of HUS, by far the largest number in Europe.

Sweden has reported 25 E. coli cases, with 10 of those people developing HUS, according to the European Commission said. Denmark reported seven E. coli cases (including three HUS) while Britain counted three cases (two HUS).

The Netherlands had one HUS case and Austria reported two cases of enterohaemorrhagic E. coli, while Switzerland has one suspected case.

The French economy, health and agriculture ministries said on Saturday that three suspected cases were being investigated in France, linked to the German epidemic and not to a batch of cucumbers withdrawn from sale earlier.

**-AFP**