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June 3, 2013

To: Each Supervisor

From: Jonathan E. Fielding, M.D., M.P.H.
Director and Health Officer

Handwritten signatures of Jonathan E. Fielding and Cynthia A. Harding in black ink, overlapping the typed names.

SUBJECT: CONTAMINATED FOOD PRODUCT/HEPATITIS A CASES

This is an update on the contaminated food product and related Hepatitis A cases. During the period of May 31, 2013 to June 2, 2013, DPH updated your Board via email regarding this incident.

Background

On Friday, May 31, 2013, the Department of Public Health (DPH) was notified of a contaminated food product that was tied to cases of Hepatitis A. Townsend Farms Organic Antioxidant Blend of frozen berries purchased at Costco appears to be the contaminated source that has resulted in some people contracting Hepatitis A. Costco voluntarily removed the product from its shelves last week. To date an official recall of the product has not been issued.

As of May 31, 2013, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) reported 30 cases of Hepatitis A in five states (Colorado, New Mexico, Nevada, Arizona, and California) tied to the contaminated product. In California, seven cases of Hepatitis A have been confirmed in persons who consumed the product in six counties (Humboldt, Orange, Riverside, San Bernardino, Los Angeles, and San Diego). Three of the seven individuals have been hospitalized and no deaths have been reported. To date, there have been two cases reported in Los Angeles County.

DPH has worked closely with the California Department of Public Health (CDPH) and the CDC to investigate and respond to this incident. On June 1, 2013 and 2, 2013, DPH operated special clinics to administer post-exposure prophylaxis and Hepatitis A vaccine to individuals who consumed the product during the identified time period, February 15, 2013 to May 30, 2013.

Hepatitis A

Hepatitis A is a liver disease that results from infection with the Hepatitis A virus. It can range in severity from a mild illness lasting a few weeks to a severe illness lasting several months. Vaccination is the best way to prevent the disease. It is recommended that children and those who travel out of the country are routinely vaccinated. When exposed to Hepatitis A, vaccination or post-exposure prophylaxis (immunoglobulin shots) must be provided within 14 days of consumption of the product to reduce or prevent illness.

Disease Investigation

When notified of the outbreak by the CDC and CDPH, DPH Acute Communicable Disease Control Program reviewed recently-diagnosed cases of Hepatitis A in Los Angeles County to determine if these individuals might have consumed the product in question. To date, DPH has identified two confirmed cases. DPH will continue to conduct surveillance and work with the medical community to identify any additional cases.

Removal of the Product from Store Shelves

As previously mentioned, on May 31, 2013, Costco voluntarily pulled the contaminated product from their shelves. To ensure that this was completed, DPH Environmental Health Program contacted Costco's corporate headquarters as well as 20 local Costco stores in Los Angeles County to confirm they had pulled the product from their store shelves. In addition, random checks were conducted at nine stores to further assure that the product had been pulled. Based on the information DPH obtained from Costco, approximately 3,000 packages of the Townsend Farms Organic Antioxidant Blend of frozen berries were sold to Costco members in Los Angeles County in the last four weeks.

Alerting the Medical Community

On May 31, 2013, DPH promptly posted information for the public as well post-exposure prophylaxis guidance for providers (created by CDPH). On the morning of June 3, 2013, DPH sent a communication widely through various channels including DPH's Health Alert Network to alert physicians of the Hepatitis A cases and to share guidelines for treating patients who had consumed the product. DPH will continue to outreach to the medical community as needed to provide information on the outbreak and to encourage rapid treating of potentially exposed persons and prompt reporting of suspected Hepatitis A cases related to the consumption of this product.

Alerting the Public

On Friday, May 31, 2013, DPH issued a press release in English and Spanish alerting the public not to consume the product and recommended that individuals who consumed this product should receive a post-exposure prophylaxis or the Hepatitis A vaccination to prevent or reduce illness. In addition to press releases, DPH posted information on DPH's website (publichealth.lacounty.gov) and 2-1-1 was provided information to respond to questions from the public and provide information about the clinics.

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Hepatitis A Vaccination Clinics

In order to ensure that Los Angeles County residents who may have consumed the product had timely access to the Hepatitis A vaccine, DPH operated seven clinics in DPH Health Centers from 10am to 4pm on Saturday, June 1, 2103 and Sunday, June 2, 2013. These clinics provided both the Hepatitis A vaccine and the post-exposure prophylaxis. The clinics were located at the following locations: Antelope Valley Health Center, North Hollywood Health Center, Monrovia Health Center, Hollywood/Wilshire Health Center, Martin Luther King, Jr. Health Center, Whittier Health Center, and Curtis Tucker Health Center.

Over the weekend, the health centers saw a total of 488 persons who received either Hepatitis A vaccination or IG Post Exposure Prophylaxis (71 on Saturday and 417 on Sunday). According to the members of the public who presented at the clinics, they had received notification from Costco on Saturday, June 1, 2013. Others reported hearing about the contamination from news and media sources.

During this week (June 3-7, 2013), DPH will provide the Hepatitis A vaccine and the post-exposure prophylaxis at the same seven clinics from 8:00 to 4:00 p.m. Later this week, DPH will reassess the need to continue the special clinics based on the ongoing disease investigation and the demand from the public.

We will continue to keep you updated as needed. If you have any questions or would like additional information, please let me know.

JEF:ch

c: Chief Executive Officer
County Counsel
Executive Officer, Board of Supervisors