

## FAQs on the Romaine associated *E. coli* O157:H7 outbreak 4/25/18

1. Is the outbreak expanding? No. As expected, the [number of cases associated with the outbreak is increasing](#). This is because of the lag time between someone getting ill and it being reported and verified to be related to the current outbreak. They were ill all along, but are only counted now- these are not truly new cases.
2. Is the outbreak ongoing? It appears not, although because of the lag time in reporting and verification, CDC wants to be sure additional cases do not come in that are more recent. The most recent illness started on April 12. CDC indicated that it could be up to 21 days from last illness onset before they are comfortable saying the outbreak is over.
3. If FDA knows who the grower is, why isn't FDA saying that? Based on our conversations with FDA, they do not yet know the grower(s) at the root of the outbreak. As part of the investigation, FDA collects records starting at the retail or foodservice location about their suppliers in a given timeframe (often weeks). Then FDA contacts each of those suppliers to understand who their suppliers are. At each step, the number of possibilities grows, and FDA traces several different "legs" to see what they have in common. FDA has informed us that it is currently tracing many legs involving multiple processors and has not yet found a single commonality that would point to the source of this issue at the field level.
4. Why did the advisory expand from chopped romaine to all romaine from the Yuma, AZ region? Initially illness was only linked to chopped romaine. However several cases in an Alaskan prison were linked to whole head romaine that had been chopped at the prison. This prompted FDA and CDC to expand the advisory. While the change from chopped romaine to all romaine is a true expansion of the advisory, an increase in the case count is not and we have cautioned CDC and FDA to use terms such as "expanding" precisely.
5. If the Alaska-based cluster sourced whole head romaine, shouldn't it be easy to tell who the grower was? Why hasn't this been announced? We have asked this same question. We have not seen the supply chain records for this investigation, so we don't know if the grower(s) that supplied the whole head romaine are the same growers that supplied other processors or retailers associated with the illnesses around the country.
6. What are the associations doing about misinformation in the press? We are doing interviews as requested, correcting misinformation as we see it, and pushing out correct information. For example, Abby Taylor-Silva did a 10 minute interview with NBC nightly news. You can see the [very brief clip](#) that made the final piece. The facts- that romaine has a relatively short shelf life, and that product currently being supplied is from California- is not as sensational as some of the other items that are being reported.
7. What are the associations doing next? We are planning a small meeting of leafy greens leadership to review food safety issues – not just associated with this outbreak, but holistically. We will then tackle an evaluation of identified risk areas and opportunities for improvement to adjust current practices, verification, and recordkeeping. Expect more information in the next

couple of weeks. At the same time we're seeking details about past outbreaks so that we can learn as much as possible. We are also trying to educate the agencies about the industry and hope to establish a standing group of SMEs who are able to provide technical input early in future investigations. Our focus will be on preventing future outbreaks, but we will also ensure that if issues arise, they can be easily identified and contained.