

More sick, dead, in European E. coli outbreak

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A market seller speaks on his cell phone behind a display of cucumbers and other vegetables in Malaga, southern Spain, Monday May 30, 2011. Vegetables from Spain are suspected of carrying the dangerous E.coli bacteria, which is suspected of killing some people in Germany and has caused many hundreds of people to become ill across Europe. Austria has moved to ban the sale of cucumbers, tomatoes and eggplants that originated from Spain, although Spanish authorities said there is no proof that they are the source of the outbreak.((AP Photo/Sergio Torres)

(AP) -- Two new deaths linked to a mysterious bacterial outbreak in Europe blamed on tainted vegetables were reported Tuesday, including the first outside Germany, as the number of people falling ill continued to rise.

The deaths brought to 16 the total number of fatalities linked to the E.

coli outbreak, with northwestern Germany the hardest-hit region.

Hospital officials in Boras, Sweden, announced the death of woman in her 50s who was admitted on May 29 after a trip to Germany. In Paderborn, Germany, the local council said an 87-year-old woman who also suffered from other ailments had died.

In Germany, the national disease control center said 373 people were sick with the most serious form of the outbreak - hemolytic uremic syndrome, or HUS, a rare complication arising from an infection most commonly associated with E. coli. That figure was up from the 329 reported Monday.

Susanne Glasmacher, a spokeswoman for the Robert Koch Institute, said another 796 people have been affected by the enterohaemorrhagic E.coli, also known as EHEC, bacteria - making a total of more than 1,150 people infected.

Hundreds of people also have been sickened in other European countries, but until Tuesday Germany had seen the only deaths.

Germany's Federal Institute for Risk Assessment is still warning consumers to avoid all cucumbers, lettuces and raw tomatoes as the outbreak is investigated.

European Union officials have said that German authorities identified cucumbers from the Spanish regions of Almeria and Malaga as possible sources of contamination and that a third suspect batch, originating either in the Netherlands or in Denmark and traded in Germany, is also under investigation.

They have also noted, however, that the transport chain is long, and the cucumbers from Spain could have been contaminated at any point along

the route.

The Danish Veterinary and Food Administration said Tuesday that no traces of EHEC bacteria were found in tests conducted over the weekend.

"There is therefore nothing that indicates that Danish cucumbers are the source of the serious E.coli outbreak that has infected several patients in Germany, Denmark and Sweden," the agency said.

In the meantime, Russia's chief sanitary agency on Monday banned the imports of cucumbers, tomatoes and fresh salad from Spain and Germany pending further notice. It said in a statement that it may even ban the imports of fresh vegetables from all European Union member states due to the lack of information about the source of infection.

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