

Two dead from Whittier Farms milk contamination

By Staff reports

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SHREWSBURY —

The Department of Public Health (DPH) has issued a warning to consumers not to drink any milk products from Whittier Farms in Shrewsbury because of listeria bacteria contamination, which has contributed to the death of two people.

Four cases of listeriosis infection have been identified by DPH, according to a statement released by the state department late this afternoon. The cases occurred in June, October and two in November. The four cases involved three elderly residents and a pregnant woman from Worcester county. Two of the people have died. They have not been identified.

DNA fingerprinting conducted by the State Laboratory Institute showed that the bacteria causing these infections came from a common source. Samples collected showed product contamination.

Whittier Farms has agreed to voluntarily suspend operations and distribution at this time until a source of contamination is identified. The firm is contacting all customers. The bulk of their distribution is home delivery to customers in the greater Worcester/Shrewsbury area. Brand names produced at Whittier Dairy include Whittier, Schultz, Balance Rock, Spring Brook, and Maple.

Photos



<http://www.whittierfarms.com/index.html>

Whittier Farm, in Shrewsbury

Listeriosis is a serious foodborne disease that can be life-threatening to certain individuals. While most cases of listeriosis occur in adults with weakened immune systems, the elderly, pregnant women and newborns, infections can occasionally occur in healthy individuals.

"Although evidence suggests that contamination is likely to be at a low level and the risk of infection low, even in those at high risk, it is recommended that consumers do not consume these products and discard any of these products they have," said DPH Director of Communicable Disease Control Dr. Al DeMaria.

Symptoms of listeriosis include fever, muscle aches and sometimes gastrointestinal symptoms such as nausea or diarrhea. The illness may be mild and symptoms are sometimes described as flu-like.

About 2,500 cases of listeriosis occur each year in the United States. Twenty-two cases occurred in Massachusetts in 2006.

For more information about Listeria, call (617) 983-6800 or visit www.mass.gov/dph.