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STATE AND LOCAL HEALTH OFFICIALS IDENTIFY POTENTIAL HEPATITIS A EXPOSURE LINKED TO FROZEN STRAWBERRIES

INDIANAPOLIS—The Indiana State Department of Health (ISDH) is urging healthcare providers to ask patients who exhibit symptoms of hepatitis A about recent strawberry consumption as part of an investigation into a multistate outbreak of hepatitis A that has been linked to frozen strawberries imported from Egypt and food items containing these strawberries.

ISDH is working with local health departments to determine where and when the potentially contaminated strawberries were served in Indiana. To date, health officials in Marion, Hamilton and Hendricks counties have confirmed that the recalled strawberries were distributed to local restaurants; additional counties could be identified as the investigation continues. Unlike other states, no schools or nursing homes in Indiana have been identified as receiving recalled products.

“Hepatitis A is a serious illness, and we know many people may be concerned about whether they have been exposed through frozen strawberries,” said State Health Commissioner Jerome Adams, M.D., M.P.H. “The health and safety of Indiana residents is our top priority, and we are working diligently with local and federal agencies to identify where the strawberries were distributed and minimize the risk of infection.”

Hepatitis A is caused by a virus that inflames the liver. Signs and symptoms of infection include:

- Nausea
- Vomiting
- Diarrhea
- Loss of appetite
- Abdominal pain
- Fever
- Jaundice (yellowing of the skin or eyes)

Symptoms can take up to 50 days to appear after exposure. Not everyone infected with the virus will exhibit symptoms, but all infected individuals can transmit the disease to others through contact with stool or unwashed hands.

Currently, eight restaurants in Marion, Hamilton and Hendricks counties have confirmed that they served products containing the affected strawberries in the last two weeks. Anyone who

consumed a food item that contained strawberries at a restaurant in those counties since Nov. 1 should contact these local health departments for more information.

Individuals who may have been exposed to hepatitis A within the last two weeks can receive either a vaccine or immunoglobulin, depending on their age, to help prevent infection by contacting their health care provider or local health department. Those whose potential exposure occurred prior to Nov. 1 should contact their healthcare provider to determine whether testing for hepatitis A is appropriate, especially if symptoms develop.

The current investigation into imported frozen strawberries is the most recent development in a national recall that began in January. The U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA) initially issued the recall in association with strawberry smoothies but expanded the scope of the recall as it discovered that additional products were affected. ISDH was notified on November 8 that the strawberries affected by the recall had been distributed in Indiana and immediately began surveying local health departments to determine when and how the strawberries were distributed.

For more information about the recall, visit <http://www.cdc.gov/hepatitis/outbreaks/2016/hav-strawberries.htm>. Facilities that may have received affected strawberries in the last two weeks are urged to contact their local health department. Contact information can be found here: <http://www.in.gov/isdh/24822.htm>.

Indiana has averaged 21 new cases of hepatitis A annually for the last five years. The number of cases remains relatively low due to the widespread use of a safe and effective vaccine. People concerned about contracting hepatitis A are urged to obtain the vaccine series from their local health department or their healthcare provider. Thorough hand washing after using the bathroom, before eating or preparing food, and changing diapers can also help lower the risk of getting or transmitting the virus.

For important health and safety information, visit the Indiana State Department of Health at www.StateHealth.in.gov or follow us on Twitter at @StateHealthIN and on Facebook at www.facebook.com/isdh1.