



# WILL COUNTY HEALTH DEPARTMENT & COMMUNITY HEALTH CENTER

Will County Health Department

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June 7, 2011

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## **FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

### **YOU CAN PROTECT YOURSELF AGAINST FOODBORNE ILLNESSES**

JOLIET – There are many ways food can become contaminated on its way to your dinner table, but there are steps consumers can take to minimize the potential for a nasty foodborne illness.

“The European E. coli outbreak currently in the news is graphic illustration of something that the public health community emphasizes every chance it gets,” according to John Cicero, Will County Health Department Executive Director. “Bacteria and viruses capable of making us sick are everywhere ... They’re in the food we eat and in the water we drink. That’s why hand washing is so critically important.”

Cicero notes there are hundreds of strains of E. coli bacteria and most of them are harmless. However, the strain linked to the outbreak ongoing in at least 13 European countries is a rare, drug-resistant form responsible for more than 2,200 recent illnesses and at least 22 fatalities in Germany and Sweden.

“It’s virtually impossible to over-emphasize the importance of hand washing before preparing or eating food,” Cicero continued. “Raw vegetables and fruit should also be washed thoroughly before eating. Of course, making informed food choices can also help you to avoid a potential illness.

“Cook your meat thoroughly and never store raw meat on shelves above other items stored in your refrigerator. Most meats should be cooked at 155 degrees and reheated meats should be warmed to 165 degrees.”



**Public Health**  
Prevent. Promote. Protect.

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The strain currently circulating in Europe is named O104:H4, and has been linked to a potentially dangerous complication involving kidney failure. Another E. coli strain linked to numerous U.S. foodborne outbreaks also produces kidney complications, called Hemolytic-uremic syndrome.

“Public health inspections at local food service establishments are designed to help minimize the potential for foodborne illnesses,” Cicero said. “There are approximately 2,800 food service establishments in Will County, and Will County Environmental Health inspects all of them regularly. It’s just one way public health works to protect all of us against potentially serious foodborne infections.”