

UK in sprout warning after French E. coli outbreak

June 25 2011, By RAPHAEL G. SATTER , Associated Press

(AP) -- British officials warned consumers Saturday against eating uncooked sprouts after authorities in France linked seeds distributed by an English vendor to an E. coli outbreak near the city of Bordeaux.

France halted the sale of fenugreek, [mustard](#) and arugula sprout [seeds](#) from British mail order seed and plant company Thompson & Morgan after eight people were hospitalized following an E. coli outbreak. French investigators found that two of them were sickened after consuming [sprouts](#) from the three seed types in the southwestern town of Begles, a suburb of Bordeaux.

Some of those affected were infected by the same strain of E. coli that has killed 44 people - all but one in Germany - and sickened more than 3,700 in recent weeks.

In a statement, Thompson & Morgan said the link being made by French officials was unsubstantiated, adding that it believed that "something local in the Bordeaux area, or the way the product has been handled and grown, is responsible for the incident rather than our seeds."

A spokesman for Britain's Food Safety Agency said that officials "don't have definitive evidence that the company is the source of the contamination," that no food poisoning cases have been reported in the U.K., and that investigations were ongoing. But in what the agency described as a precautionary move, it released a statement warning that "sprouted seeds should only be eaten if they have been cooked

thoroughly until steaming hot throughout."

The official, who spoke on condition of anonymity, in line with department policy, noted that European health authorities have misattributed the source of E. coli outbreaks in the past. Spanish cucumbers, for example, were wrongly blamed for the illnesses in Germany.

Thompson & Morgan said that French officials were still testing the seeds and investigating how they were grown. In the meantime, the company said it had submitted samples of its seeds to British health authorities for investigation.

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