

Contaminated pickles kill seven in Japan

August 19 2012

Seven people, most of them elderly women, died after eating pickles contaminated with E. coli in northern Japan, officials said Sunday, in the country's deadliest mass food poisoning in 10 years.

A total of 103 others have been made ill after eating the same lightly pickled Chinese cabbage produced in late July by a company in the city of Sapporo, according to health bulletins issued by the local government.

Of the dead, six were elderly women who ate the pickles at nursing homes in Sapporo and in another city on Hokkaido island. A four-year-old girl died on August 11 in Sapporo.

In the city of Ebetsu, a woman centenarian died early Sunday from multiple-organ failure, nine days after she was hospitalised, a Hokkaido regional health official said.

"She ate the pickles served at breakfast at her nursing home on August 1," the official, Narihiko Kawamura, told AFP by telephone.

The Sapporo girl died five days after developing symptoms of E. coli poisoning, according to an official at the city's public health centre.

"She and her family used to eat the company's cabbage pickles, which they often bought at a local supermarket. But it is not certain when she ate the contaminated product," the official, Seiichi Miyahara, said by telephone.

Two other women in their 90s died on Thursday in Ebetsu after eating the pickles at nursing homes.

"It is not easy to determine how the bacteria were mixed with the pickles," Miyahara said. "We don't know yet whether there was any major problem in sanitary control at the company."

In 2002, nine people died from E. coli bacteria poisoning after eating a marinated chicken and vegetable dish at a hospital and its annex, a nursing home for the aged, in the provincial city of Utsunomiya, north of Tokyo.

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