

Hawaii authorities urge awareness of raw food risk

August 17 2016, by Audrey Mcavoy



Employees clean the Genki Sushi conveyor belt restaurant chain Tuesday, Aug. 16, 2016, in Aiea, Hawaii. The Hawaii State Department of Health Sanitation said Tuesday that Genki Sushi is being ordered to close its 10 restaurants on Oahu and one on Kauai after state authorities identified its raw scallops as the probable source of a hepatitis A outbreak. The disease can cause fever, loss of appetite and other symptoms. (AP Photo/Caleb Jones)

Hawaii authorities are urging diners to be aware of the risks of eating

raw and undercooked food after they traced a hepatitis A outbreak to frozen scallops served raw at a sushi restaurant chain.

State Department of Health Sanitation Branch Chief Peter Oshiro said Tuesday he and others in Hawaii like to eat food raw. But he said people should have their "eyes wide open" about such foods and understand there's a possibility they could get sick.

"Obviously I am an enjoyer of raw foods also, and I am at risk just like all of you. This is not going to stop me from eating it because I recognize that it tastes good," Oshiro said.

The department on Monday ordered Genki Sushi, a popular restaurant chain that serves [sushi](#) on a conveyor belt, to close 10 restaurants on Oahu and one on Kauai.

The restaurants must dispose of their food supply and disposable items like cups and napkins and disinfect the facilities before they reopen, Oshiro said.

The outbreak has sickened 168 people so far. The disease can cause fever, loss of appetite, nausea and other ailments.

The department said the tainted product is called Sea Port Bay Scallops distributed by Koha Oriental Foods. They were shipped frozen, but Genki Sushi served them raw. The box says the scallops are from the Philippines.



An employee cleans a logo at the Genki Sushi conveyor belt restaurant chain Tuesday, Aug. 16, 2016, in Aiea, Hawaii. The Hawaii State Department of Health Sanitation said Tuesday that Genki Sushi is being ordered to close its 10 restaurants on Oahu and one on Kauai after state authorities identified its raw scallops as the probable source of a hepatitis A outbreak. The disease can cause fever, loss of appetite and other symptoms. (AP Photo/Caleb Jones)

U.S. Food and Drug Administration spokeswoman Lauren Sucher said the agency is working to confirm the source.

People can contract the virus by eating contaminated food, drinking contaminated water, close personal contact or sex.

The company immediately complied with the department's order, said Mary Hansen, Genki Sushi USA chief administrative officer. "We continue to work with the Department of Health to ensure we're in compliance so we can reopen our restaurants as soon as possible," she

said.

Genki Sushi patrons select their sushi items by taking them off a [conveyor belt](#) that moves around tables and counters. Maui and Big Island restaurants aren't being ordered to close because state [health](#) authorities haven't verified the scallops were delivered there.



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The state health department first announced the hepatitis A outbreak on July 1, but it struggled to identify the source because of the disease's

long incubation period. It's been difficult for those infected to remember everything they ate and all the people with whom they had contact.

Dr. Sarah Park, the state's epidemiologist, said one key piece of information was that 70 percent of those infected had eaten at Genki Sushi, but only 22 to 23 percent of those who replied to a department survey had. She said health officials didn't get a response like that for any other restaurant, food chain or grocery store.

Park said the department is concerned the scallops may have been served or distributed to places other than Genki Sushi because a small number of patients say they didn't eat at the chain. Park said the distributor said it only provided the scallops to the Genki Sushi.

Park said the health department has notified other U.S. health agencies so doctors around the country can consider travel history to Hawaii if their patients report hepatitis A symptoms.

Attorneys for an Oahu resident, Brant Mauk, on Tuesday filed a lawsuit against Genki Sushi and Koha Oriental Foods alleging negligence and seeking damages. Hansen said Genki Sushi hadn't seen the lawsuit and didn't have any comment. A voicemail message left for Koha Oriental Foods wasn't immediately returned.



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