

Two strains of E. coli identified

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Six Calaveras County children diagnosed in recent weeks with E. coli have two different strains of the virus, said Calaveras County Health Health Officer Dr. Dean Kelaita.

DNA testing by the state Department of Health Services shows that the first three children diagnosed in early May have the same strain. But the other three -- all teenagers later found to have E. coli -- have a different strain.

"The second cluster of infection ... while related to each other, are not related to the first cluster of infection in the young children," Kelaita said.

A 13-year-old Angels Camp boy who exhibited cattle at the May 13-16 Calaveras County Fair was diagnosed June 11. Two brothers from Murphys, ages 14 and 17 who tested positive for E. coli were also exhibitors.

The DNA testing on the E. coli strain these three teenagers had closely matches the strain found in E. coli cases in Michigan, Missouri and Ohio, Kelaita said.

Including the three Calaveras County teenagers, there are now 12 cases nationwide that could be from the same source.

Kelaita said the investigation will next focus on what the teens had been eating when they contracted the bacteria.

"The most common source of E. coli infection is from eating undercooked ground beef," he said.

But, the boys may have come in contact with manure from a contaminated cow at the fair livestock barns, health officials have said.

The first Calaveras County children diagnosed with the bacteria were Nicholas Kristoff and his 8-month-old sister Abigail. Nicholas, 4, of Angels Camp, developed an E. coli-related kidney complication called Hemolytic Uremic Syndrome and was sent to Oakland Children's Hospital early last month. Nicholas was in critical condition for nearly three weeks, but has since recovered and is back home.

Soon after, another 3-year-old girl who received care from the Kristoff children's mother, Staci Kristoff, tested positive.

All those children had the same kind of E. coli infection.

The teen victims had only mild intestinal problems due to the infection. In worse cases, it can cause nausea, vomiting and bloody diarrhea that can lead to a high fever.

Symptoms of E. coli can include severe diarrhea and abdominal cramps, but patients can sometimes have no symptoms. Usually little or no fever is present and the illness usually resolves itself in five to 10 days.

Kelaita doubts that undiscovered cases remain in the county.

"The fact that the number of cases is small and no new cases have been diagnosed ... indicates that the health risk to the public is low," he said.