

Health officials in the U.S. and Canada told people on Tuesday to avoid eating romaine lettuce because of a new E. coli outbreak. The U.S. Food and Drug Administration said it was working with officials in Canada on the outbreak, which has sickened 32 people in 11 states in the United States and 18 people in the Canadian provinces of Ontario and Quebec. Tony Sellers, director of communications at the Oklahoma State Department of Health, said symptoms of E. coli would set in two to eight days after contact with the bacteria. If symptoms set in, call a doctor and report the illness, Sellers said. "First thing is certainly contact your health care provider and write down all you've eaten in the last week," Sellers said. "That will help investigators track to the source of the germ." The strain identified is different from the one linked to romaine earlier this year but appears similar to one linked to leafy greens last year. FDA Commissioner Scott Gottlieb says the agency didn't have enough information to ask that suppliers issue a recall, but he said supermarkets and restaurants should withdraw romaine products until the contamination can be identified. No deaths have been reported, but 13 of the people who became sick in the U.S. were hospitalized. The last reported illness was on Oct. 31. Reasor's Marketing Manager Amanda Russell said the area supermarket chain is pulling all romaine lettuce products from its shelves and will offer any concerned customers a refund for those products already bought. Tracing the source of contaminated lettuce can be difficult because it's often repackaged by middlemen, said Sarah Sorscher, deputy director of regulatory affairs at the Center for Science in the Public Interest. That can mean the entire industry becomes implicated in outbreaks, even if not all products are contaminated. Washing contaminated lettuce won't ensure that it is safe, Sorscher said. Kenny Naylor, director of food safety & consumer protection services with the Oklahoma Department of Agriculture, said the department doesn't keep statistics on romaine lettuce production in the state because of its small numbers. The way the bacteria are carried on products can vary from outbreak to outbreak, so it's

safer to not consume them at all, Naylor said. Most E. coli bacteria are benign, but some can cause illness, with symptoms including severe stomach cramps, diarrhea and vomiting. Most people recover within a week, but some illnesses can last longer and be more severe. Stetson Payne and The Associated Press contributed to this story. Stetson Payne 918-732-8135 stetson.payne@tulsaworld.com Twitter: @stetson__payne