

PENNY SAVER NEWS

FAX: 932-5261

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BY: Mary A. Keith, Ph.D., L.D.
Food, Nutrition and Health Agent**HILLSBOROUGH COUNTY**

5339 S. County Road 579

Seffner, FL 33584-3334

PH:(813)744-5519 x 136, FAX:744-5776
e-mail:makeith@mail.ifas.ufl.edu**Not Only From the Animals**

If you've been following the news recently you have surely heard of the twenty-some people who got sick after going to one of Central Florida's several fairs. They have all been poisoned by a type of bacteria called *E. coli*. So far it seems that they all had some contact with animals in a petting zoo at the fairs. The zoo has stopped showing its animals, and other events not associated with the petting zoo but having similar names have seen dramatic drops in attendance. While we certainly need to pay attention, can we blame it all on the animals? Not really.

If we just look at the bacteria causing the poisoning, we can't say positively that they came from the zoo animals. *E. coli* are very common bacteria. There are thousands of kinds of them. The kind the sick people have is not the exact same kind that have been found on the animals. *E. coli* live on people too. They can grow outside of living animals (or people), in food, in meat and meat dishes, on eggs. They can survive on a door knob or water fountain handle, in water, on a paper cup.

Most kinds of *E. coli* don't make anyone sick. They don't make animals sick. Many are always found inside people. They live there all the time, and no one ever gets sick from them. It's only a few, out of the thousands of kinds, that make us sick. The ones that made these people sick might have come from other people at the fair.

Besides *E. coli* there are thousands of other kinds of bacteria that live on people. *Staphylococcus* and *Salmonella* are just two common examples. There are many kinds of each, but only a few make us sick. There are some people who always have *Staph.*

living on them. These 'carriers' don't get sick, but when they pass the bacteria on other people get sick. Some kinds of *Staph.* live better in people than in animals or foods. Some kinds of *Salmonella* always live in people. These don't make us sick, only a few special kinds do.

Many of these that live inside us can survive at least a few hours on outside surfaces. People can leave a trail of bacteria behind them, every place they sneeze, cough, or touch. Places such as the rails around the petting zoo probably have bacteria, but so do stair rails, chairs and benches, counters at food stands, telephones and even our computer keyboards. Children are particularly likely to pick up bacteria from toys and from places such as swings, slides, and strollers.

This does not mean we should never go out! It does mean that we need to keep the bacteria out of us. The first, easiest, most important and most effective way of doing that is by washing our hands and making sure our children wash their hands. We also need to teach children as early as possible to not put their fingers or toys in their mouths, to keep bacteria on fingers from getting inside.

We should wash hands after touching any animal, at a zoo at the fair or the pet at home. Pets' long hair is a great place for bacteria to hide, so pets don't belong in the kitchen at home. Especially in areas where there are lots of other people who might be carrying bacteria, hands need to be washed often. Always before eating or drinking and after using the restroom, hands must be washed.

While they are not as effective as scrubbing with soap and water, the hand wipes or bottles of hand-wash gels are easier to carry along. Use them when you can't get the children to a restroom to wash their hands.

This week's recipe is pasta salad for a warm spring day. For extra color add

some grated carrots or chopped red bell pepper. If you don't want shrimp, substitute crab or chicken cubes. Remember to wash your hands!

Spring Pasta Salad

4 oz (1 1/4 cups) medium shell pasta	1/2 C plain nonfat yogurt
1 Tbsp spicy brown mustard	1 Tbsp salt-free herb seasoning
3/4 C chopped celery	1/2 C sliced green onion
1 1/2 C coarsely chopped tomatoes (about 2 medium)	1/2 lb cooked shrimp

Cook pasta according to package directions. Drain and chill. In large bowl stir together yogurt, mustard and herb seasoning. Add pasta, celery and onions. Mix well. Chill at least 2 hours. Just before serving stir in tomatoes and shrimp (or crab or chicken).

Refrigerate leftovers promptly. Serves 6.

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