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### **Case Study: Salad Bar Salmonella Report**

In regards to the 1984 outbreak of salmonella that occurred in Oregon in 1984, I think something like this could happen today. From my own experience, it seems that it is quite common for supermarkets, currently more so than restaurants, to have openly accessible food items that are susceptible to either intentional or unintentional contamination. For example, most Whole Foods stores have openly areas where customers can access food items in a buffet-like setting. The article also notes that regulation of commercially available pathogens or other food safety measures would not be effective means of preventing an incident like this from happening again.

This incident was initially handled as a food-borne outbreak. If terrorism was first suspected, I think it might have changed the management of the incident, since the summary of the incident points to a substantial amount of effort that went into attempting to identify the source of the illness. Had it been identified as an intentional act, it might have changed much of the initial investigatory procedures by public health officials.

I think that this incident can be considered a “public health disaster” in that it seemingly overwhelmed the resources of the county agency and required the response of multiple agencies, including the Oregon Health Division, the FBI, and the CDC. Although there were no fatalities, it was still a large-scale incident.

Based on my review of the article, it does not seem like there was much coordination between law-enforcement and public health in the initial stages of the incident. I think this was partly because, at the time, criminality was not initially suspected. Notably, the report stated that indictments for this case did not occur until 1986, nearly two years after the incident.<sup>1</sup>

As a public-health professional, once such an outbreak has been suspected, I think I would be most concerned about identifying the source of the outbreak, not ruling out the possibility that food items were intentionally contaminated. I would also want to ensure that every effort is made to prevent any further risk to the general public. So, I think it would be important to introduce clear communication and guidance, for the both the general public and stores in the area that sell food to the public, so that appropriate interim steps can be taken to prevent further illness. I also think it would be important to inform the public as to what signs and symptoms to be aware of and how and when they should seek professional care if they are symptomatic.

## References

- (1) Török TJ;Tauxe RV;Wise RP;Livengood JR;Sokolow R;Mauvais S;Birkness KA;Skeels MR;Horan JM;Foster LR; (n.d.). *A large community outbreak of salmonellosis caused by intentional contamination of restaurant salad bars*. JAMA.  
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