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News media calls to David Hass at (630) 682-7979, ext. 7374.

DuPage County Health Department warns consumers About illegally manufactured cheese that could cause illness

The DuPage County Health Department is warning residents about the danger of consuming illegally manufactured Mexican-style cheeses, such as queso fresco or queso cotija. This warning came after a sample of Mexican-style cheeses from a grocery store in Kane County tested positive for *Salmonella*. The manufacturer of the *Salmonella*-contaminated cheese in Kane County has not been clearly identified.

The DuPage County Health Department on Friday was notifying DuPage County restaurants and grocery stores of this risk. The Illinois Department of Public Health has asked health departments to inspect Hispanic markets and restaurants for the suspect cheeses and DuPage County Health Department staff members are currently doing these inspections.

Residents are asked to check cheese products to make sure licensed manufacturers produce them, even if the products came from grocery stores. Legitimate Mexican-style cheeses are available in the refrigerated cases at retail stores and authenticated by label information specifying the legal name of the product, name and address of distributor or processor, quantity of contents, an ingredient statement and nutrition facts (in most cases).

Salmonella bacteria can be found in illegally manufactured cheese. While the bacteria cannot be detected by sight, taste or smell, they can cause illness, including fever, abdominal cramps and diarrhea. Most individuals can recover on their own in three to five days. The infection can be more severe in young children, the elderly and those with compromised immune systems.

Consumers who are ill with fever and diarrhea, who also may have consumed Mexican-style cheese, should contact their physician for further evaluation, including possible testing for *Salmonella*. If consumers believe their illnesses are linked to Mexican-style cheese, they should contact the health department and hold the cheese in case it is needed for testing.

For questions, or to report cases of salmonellosis, please call the DuPage County Health Department at (630) 682-7979, ext. 7553.