INFORMATION UPDATE

TO: Mayor and Members
   Board of Health

DATE: September 18, 2020

SUBJECT: E. coli O157:H7 Associated with Valens Lake Conservation Area

WARD(S) AFFECTED: City Wide

SUBMITTED BY: Michelle Baird,
   Director, Epidemiology, Wellness and Communicable Disease Control Division
   Public Health Services

SIGNATURE: 

On the evening of September 17, 2020, Public Health Ontario (PHO) notified Hamilton Public Health Services (PHS) of an outbreak of E. coli O157:H7 cases associated with Valens Lake Conservation Area. A total of seven cases of E. coli across five health units are part of the outbreak, with one of the six cases being a Hamilton resident. Six cases report visiting and swimming in the lake at Valens Lake Conservation Area in Hamilton. One case is pending follow-up. Given the clustering by age, with the majority of cases under the age of 12 years old, and temporal distribution, PHO has declared an outbreak.

E. coli (Escherichia coli) is a bacteria that, when consumed, can cause serious illness. In most cases, the illness is self-limiting, with symptoms such as diarrhea, fever, vomiting and abdominal cramps, but it may lead to a life-threatening disease including haemolytic uraemic syndrome (HUS), especially in young children and the elderly. E. coli is transmitted to a person most commonly through consumption of contaminated food or water.

PHO conducts genetic testing on E. coli specimens collected from cases in Ontario and through this process identified that the seven cases of E. coli were genetically linked to each other meaning each was likely exposed to the same source of infection as this was a single genetic strain of the bacteria.
A decision to close the swimming area at Valens Lake was made today in order to mitigate any further exposures at this site. PHS’ staff communicated the concerns to the Hamilton Conservation Authority.

PHS continues to work with PHO as the investigation into this outbreak continues. An advisory to the medical community will be issued today and a media release is scheduled to follow this report.

APPENDICES AND SCHEDULES ATTACHED

Not Applicable.