

Ottawa woman joins listeria lawsuit after month-long illness

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An Ottawa woman has joined a proposed class-action lawsuit against Maple Leaf Foods after feeling ill for almost a month.

"I'm not in the lawsuit for the money," said 53-year-old Cezanne Bilodeau. "But if this is what it takes, this is what it takes. 'Cause it's wrong and people are dying."

So far, 15 deaths have been associated with the outbreak linked to the strain of listeria found in certain Maple Leaf Foods products. In five cases, listeria has been confirmed as causing or contributing to the death. The other 10 deaths are still under investigation.

Of the deaths associated with the outbreak, 12 were in Ontario, one in B.C., one in Quebec and one in Saskatchewan.

Dozens of the products have been recalled.

Bilodeau was to see a doctor Thursday for tests to determine whether she has listeriosis.

Bilodeau's nausea, low-grade fever and headaches are consistent with listeriosis, and she is keeping in her freezer the Maple Leaf turkey bacon that she believes made her sick. The proposed lawsuit she joined is one of several across the country.

Ted Charney, a member of the legal team representing people in the suit, said even if Bilodeau tests negative for listeria, she may still be eligible for compensation.

Under Canadian law, he said, anyone who purchased products on the recall list, ate them, and then developed symptoms consistent with listeriosis would be eligible for compensation.

Ottawa's chief medical officer of health, Dr. Isra Levy, said despite the publicity surrounding the listeriosis outbreak, people shouldn't panic.

"The recall has been very large, but in fact it's entirely possible that only a small portion of the meat that was recalled was actually contaminated," Levy said.

That means, even though people ate them, it's likely most won't fall ill, he added.

In Ottawa so far, there has been one confirmed case of listeriosis linked to the outbreak. However, the victim has since recovered.

Levy said because of the 70-day incubation period, it could take two months before the full impact of the outbreak is known.

Meanwhile, Idris Ben-Tahir, an Ottawa senior who ate a package of shaved corned beef a week ago that is on the recall list, said he is anxiously watching for symptoms of listeriosis.

"I'm quite concerned because I am a walking time bomb," the 69-year-old retired senior said. "I don't know when and if this will occur."

Ben-Tahir said he has another nine weeks to go before the incubation period is over.