

Suspected Bacterial Intoxications Associated with a Restaurant

September

Ramsey County

On September 12, 2011, the Minnesota Department of Health (MDH) foodborne illness hotline received a complaint of gastrointestinal illness from an individual who ate dinner at a restaurant in St. Paul on September 10. On September 14, MDH received a second illness complaint from two individuals who also dined at the restaurant on September 10. City of St. Paul sanitarians were notified and an investigation was initiated.

City of St. Paul sanitarians visited the restaurant on September 14 to evaluate food preparation and handling procedures and collect credit card receipts for additional patrons. MDH staff interviewed patrons identified from credit card receipts about food consumption and illness history. A case was defined as a restaurant patron who developed vomiting or diarrhea (≥ 3 loose stools in a 24-hour period) after eating at the restaurant. Due to delayed notification of the outbreak, stool samples were not collected.

Fifteen restaurant patrons were interviewed; three (20%) met the case definition. The median incubation period for the cases was 4 hours (range, 3 to 4.5 hours). The median duration of illness was 7 hours (range, 6 to 8 hours). All three cases reported diarrhea and vomiting, one (33%) reported cramps and fever, and none reported bloody stools.

While no food items were statistically associated with illness, all three cases reported consuming spring rolls. The three cases reported dining at the restaurant at the same time, whereas the non-ill controls who reported consuming spring rolls dined at the restaurant several hours later. City of St. Paul sanitarians conducted a food preparation review of the spring rolls, and no violations were identified.

This was a foodborne illness outbreak associated with a restaurant in St. Paul. The etiology was not determined, but the illnesses were consistent with a bacterial intoxication caused by either *Staphylococcus aureus* or the emetic form of *Bacillus cereus*. While spring rolls were suspected, a specific vehicle could not be confirmed.