

Gastroenteritis Associated with a Restaurant

April

Hennepin County

On April 1, 2011, the Minnesota Department of Health (MDH) foodborne illness hotline received a complaint of gastrointestinal illness among a group of four individuals who ate at a restaurant in Minneapolis, Minnesota on March 29. A second complaint was received by MDH on April 4, 2011 regarding a family of four who had eaten from the lunch buffet on April 2. Hennepin County Human Services and Public Health Department (HSPHD) epidemiology unit and Minneapolis Environmental Health (MEH) staff were notified, and an investigation was initiated.

The complainants provided MDH staff with names and contact numbers for their meal companions, who were then interviewed about illness history and food consumption at the restaurant. A case was defined as person who developed vomiting and/or diarrhea (≥ 3 loose stools in a 24-hour period) after eating at the restaurant. Stool specimen kits were sent to three patrons for submission to MDH for bacterial and viral testing.

MEH sanitarians inspected the restaurant and interviewed all food service employees responsible for preparing items served to the complaint groups. The restaurant did not have credit card receipts for other patrons who had meals prepared at the restaurant on March 29 or April 2.

Eight patrons were interviewed, and six (75%) met the case definition. One additional patron reported gastrointestinal symptoms that did not meet the case definition and was excluded from analysis.

The two complaint groups reported different symptoms and incubation periods. Among the March complaint group, both cases reported diarrhea and cramps but no fever, vomiting, or bloody stools. The incubation periods were 25.5 hours and 27.5 hours. Illness duration information was not available as both cases were still ill at the time of interview. Both cases submitted stool specimens which were negative for norovirus and bacterial pathogens. Individuals from this group reported consuming swarma gyros, yellow rice, and a chicken dinner ordered from the menu.

Among the April 4 complaint group, all four reported vomiting, three (75%) reported cramps, one (25%) reported diarrhea, and none reported fever or bloody stools. The median incubation period was 10 hours (range, 6 to 10 hours). The illness durations for two patrons who had recovered at the time of interview were 1 and 7 hours. No stool specimens were submitted from this group. Individuals from this group reported consuming lamb ribs, lamb steak, chicken wings, and falafel from the lunch buffet.

The sanitarian interviewed restaurant staff about preparation methods for the foods served at these meals and about any recent gastrointestinal illness. Nine employees were responsible for the food preparation; none of the employees reported illness during the prior 2 weeks. No improper food handling practices were observed by the sanitarian. Because one group had short incubation periods, hot ($n=5$) and cold ($n=4$) food items were selected to obtain temperatures. All fell within acceptable ranges for the type of item.

This was a probable foodborne outbreak associated with a restaurant in Minneapolis. Neither an etiology nor a vehicle of transmission was identified. The distribution of symptoms and incubation periods

differed between the two complaint groups. Possible explanations include two separate contamination events, or a source of illness other than the restaurant for at least one of the groups.