

Suspected Norovirus Gastroenteritis Associated with a Restaurant

August

Hennepin County

On August 4, 2011, the Minnesota Department of Health (MDH) foodborne illness hotline received a complaint from a staff member of a week-long day camp run by the City of St. Louis Park. The complainant reported that at least 5 of the 25 staff and campers had become ill with vomiting and/or diarrhea since the camp started on August 1. Activities at the camp included bowling and lunch at a restaurant on August 1, approximately 30 hours prior to individuals reportedly becoming ill. St. Louis Park Environmental Health (SLPEH) was notified and an investigation was initiated.

A list of staff and campers was obtained from the camp administrator. The administrator also provided a schedule of activities for camp that week and foods/beverages consumed. Epidemiologists from MDH interviewed campers and staff about food/beverage consumption and illness history. A case was defined as a summer camp staff member or camper who developed vomiting and/or diarrhea (≥ 3 loose stools in a 24-hour period) after the start of the camp.

A list of restaurant patrons from August 1 was obtained from the restaurant. A sanitarian from SLPEH visited the restaurant to evaluate food preparation and handling procedures and to interview staff regarding recent illness and job duties.

Illness histories and exposure information were obtained from 13 camp staff and campers. Six (46%) cases were identified. All six cases reported vomiting, four (67%) reported diarrhea, three (50%) reported cramps, and two (40%) of five reported fever. The median incubation period from the lunch meal at the restaurant was 37 hours (range, 29 to 53 hours). The median duration of illness was 25 hours (range, 10 to 38 hours) for the five cases who had recovered at the time of interview.

Due to the limited menu, a meaningful statistical analysis could not be performed. Foods consumed by the patrons included pizza and soda. All other foods consumed at the camp that day were pre-packaged and individual-sized.

Illness histories and exposure information were obtained from 13 additional restaurant patrons; one patron reported illness, however, their onset was 4 hours after their meal.

At the start of the investigation sanitarians and management established a screening protocol for employee illness. Illness histories and job duty information were obtained from all employees who worked on August 1; no employees reported any recent gastrointestinal illness.

This was a probable foodborne illness outbreak associated with a restaurant. The etiologic agent was not confirmed; however, the symptoms and incubation periods were characteristic of norovirus gastroenteritis. The vehicle of transmission and source of contamination were not identified. While no one reported being previously ill, it is possible that an unidentified infected camp staff member or camper contaminated the food or infected others during other camp activities.