

Norovirus Gastroenteritis Associated with a Restaurant

May

Hennepin County

On May 17, 2011, the City of Edina Health Department received a complaint from a party of three individuals who had dined at a restaurant in Edina on May 14. The complainant reported that all

three individuals had developed symptoms of gastrointestinal illness after their meal. The Minnesota Department of Health (MDH) was notified, and an investigation was initiated on May 18.

Epidemiologists from MDH interviewed restaurant patrons to obtain information on food/beverage consumption and illness history. A case was defined as a restaurant patron who subsequently developed vomiting and/or diarrhea (≥ 3 loose stools in a 24-hour period). The restaurant was unable to provide credit card receipts for additional patrons. A stool specimen was obtained from one patron and submitted to MDH for bacterial and viral testing.

A sanitarian from the City of Edina visited the restaurant to evaluate food preparation and handling procedures and to interview staff regarding recent illness and job duties.

The City of Edina and MDH each received an additional complaint from parties who had dined at the restaurant on May 14 and 17 before becoming ill with symptoms of gastrointestinal illness. Illness histories and exposure information were obtained from six restaurant patrons. Five (83%) cases were identified.

All five cases reported diarrhea, four (80%) reported vomiting, three (60%) reported cramps, and two (40%) reported fever. The median incubation period was 31.5 hours (range, 28 to 33.5 hours). The median duration of illness was 71.5 hours (range, 36 to 107 hours) for the two cases with known recovery date times. The one stool sample tested positive for norovirus GII.

The small number of cases and lack of non-ill controls prevented a statistical analysis of specific food exposures. However, four of the five cases report eating different kinds of salads.

Illness histories and job duty information were obtained from nine employees. Two employees reported recently having a gastrointestinal illness, with illness onset dates of May 13 and 15. The employee with the May 13 onset reported working while actively having diarrhea. Employees reporting illness performed a variety of job duties at the restaurant, including food preparation. The City of Edina sanitarians stressed the importance of proper handling of food and beverages, use of gloves when handling ready-to-eat foods, proper handwashing, and exclusion of ill employees.

This was a foodborne outbreak of norovirus gastroenteritis associated with a restaurant in Edina. While a specific vehicle was not identified, the presence of ill employees indicates that contamination of ready-to-eat food by an ill food worker was the most plausible source of contamination.