

Norovirus Gastroenteritis Associated a Workshop held at a Restaurant

January

Stevens County

On January 19, 2011, a call was received on the Minnesota Department of Health (MDH) foodborne illness hotline regarding a workshop that had taken place on January 12 at a restaurant in Morris. The complainant reported illness among the group who had put on the workshop and was unsure whether those attending the workshop had also become ill. An investigation was initiated immediately.

MDH Environmental Health Services (EHS) sanitarians visited the restaurant on January 20 to evaluate food preparation and handling procedures, interview food workers, and determine if there were other meetings or conferences at the restaurant. No other such events had occurred. MDH staff obtained a list of workshop attendees from the workshop organizer. The attendees were interviewed about food consumption at the event and illness history. A case was defined as an attendee of the workshop at the restaurant who subsequently developed vomiting or diarrhea (≥ 3 loose stools in a 24-hour period). Stool samples collected from consenting workshop attendees and employees were submitted to the MDH Public Health Laboratory for bacterial and viral testing.

There were 9 workshop staff and 32 workshop attendees. MDH was able to interview 30 (73%) of those involved with the workshop. Twenty-two (73%) met the case definition. Five people reported illness

but did not meet the case definition and thus were excluded from further analysis. Eighteen cases (82%) reported vomiting, 17 (77%) reported diarrhea, 11 (50%) reported cramps, 8 (36%) reported fever, and none reported bloody stools. The median incubation period from the buffet lunch was 34 hours (range, 27 to 52 hours). The median duration of illness for the 20 cases who had recovered at the time of the interview was 46 hours (range, 23 to 84 hours). Three stool samples were submitted for testing and one tested positive for norovirus GI.

Workshop attendees were offered coffee, water, soda and an assortment of donuts at the start of the meeting and cookies for an afternoon snack. The donuts and cookies were brought in from a local bakery. The buffet lunch, which consisted of roast beef, roast pork, a dinner roll, mashed potatoes, gravy, and corn was prepared and served at the restaurant. The small number of non-ill controls precluded a meaningful statistical analysis of specific food items served at the lunch.

MDH EHS sanitarians interviewed all 20 restaurant employees in order to assess illness. Five reported recent gastrointestinal illness. A server had an onset of January 1 and a recovery date of January 2, with symptoms of vomiting and fever. A cook/custodian had an onset of January 8 and a recovery date of January 10, with symptoms of vomiting and diarrhea. Another server had an onset of January 9 and a recovery date of January 10, with symptoms of vomiting, diarrhea, cramps, and a fever. A cook had an onset of January 10 and a recovery date of January 11, with symptoms of diarrhea. A server/bartender had an onset date of January 15 and a recovery date of January 16, with symptoms of vomiting, diarrhea, and cramps. The employees with onsets on January 8, 9, and 10 worked on January 12; one of these employees reported preparing the dinner rolls, gravy, and corn for the lunch served on January 12. A stool kit was sent to this employee but was not returned.

During the investigation sanitarians and restaurant management established a screening protocol for employee illness. The sanitarian also discussed the importance of handwashing and not working while ill and for 72 hours after resolution of symptoms for the prevention of norovirus transmission.

This was a foodborne outbreak of norovirus gastroenteritis associated with a restaurant in Morris. No specific food vehicle was identified. The source of the contamination likely was one or more of the several food workers who had recent gastrointestinal illness and worked on January 12.