

Norovirus Gastroenteritis Probably Associated with a Party

November

Hennepin County

On November 28, 2012, the Minnesota Department of Health (MDH) foodborne illness hotline received a complaint that 5 of 14 meal companions developed gastrointestinal illness after eating at Restaurant A in Minneapolis as part of a birthday party on November 24. A majority of the meal companions reported several additional common exposures including a catered meal from Restaurant B on November 23, cake from Bakery X on November 24, and soup at a private residence on November 25. Hennepin County Human Services and Public Health Department (HSPHD) epidemiology and the Minneapolis Division of Environmental Health (MDEH) were contacted and an investigation was initiated.

MDEH sanitarians visited Restaurant A and Bakery X on November 26 to evaluate food preparation and handling procedures and discuss employee illness policy. The party organizer provided contact information for attendees. A case was defined as a birthday party attendee who developed vomiting or diarrhea (≥ 3 loose stools in a 24-hour period) after the gatherings. Stool samples collected from consenting individuals were submitted to the MDH Public Health Laboratory for bacterial and viral testing.

Nine party attendees were interviewed, and four (44%) met the case definition. The median incubation period for the cases from the meal at Restaurant A was 31.5 hours (range, 26 to 41 hours). All four cases reported diarrhea and cramping, three (75%) fever, two (50%) vomiting, and none bloody stools. The duration of illness for both cases who had recovered at the time of interview was 2 days. Stool samples submitted by one ill attendee tested positive for norovirus GII.

A majority of the meal companions reported several common exposures including a catered meal from Restaurant B on November 23 (3 of 4 cases vs. 4 of 5 controls), dinner at Restaurant A on November 24 (4 of 4 cases vs. 5 of 5 controls), cake from Bakery X on November 24 (4 of 4 cases vs. 5 of 5 controls), and soup at a private residence on November 25 (3 of 4 cases vs. 2 of 5 controls).

MDEH sanitarians visited both Restaurant A and Bakery X on November 30. During the visit, the sanitarians discussed employee illness policy, the importance of handwashing for the prevention of norovirus transmission, and the need to exclude all employees with vomiting and/or diarrhea from work until 72 hours after the resolution of symptoms. While the restaurant and bakery did not report having ill employees, the bakery did not maintain an employee illness log and was instructed to do so. The restaurant was instructed to inform MDEH of all illness complaints and to have employees use gloves when handling ready-to-eat foods.

This was an outbreak of norovirus gastroenteritis probably associated consumption of food at or from a commercial food establishment as part of a birthday party. The complaint group had several common exposures during the incubation period. As a result, neither a vehicle nor the source of the contamination was identified. However, based on the distribution of incubations, the exposure most likely occurred on November 24, thus narrowing the potential source to Restaurant A or Bakery X.