

Scombroid Poisoning Associated with a Restaurant

September

Dakota County

On September 11, 2012, the Minnesota Department of Health (MDH) foodborne illness hotline received a complaint of illness among a group that had dined at a restaurant in Lakeville on September 7. The complainant reported that three of six group members became ill with scombroid-like symptoms after consuming seared or blackened tuna at the restaurant. An investigation was initiated immediately.

MDH Environmental Health Services (EHS) sanitarians visited the restaurant on September 11 to evaluate food preparation and handling procedures, focusing their observation on tuna storage and handling. MDH staff interviewed the three ill patrons about food consumption and illness history. A case was defined as a patron who developed symptoms consistent with scombroid poisoning after eating tuna at the restaurant.

Three patrons were interviewed; two (67%) met the case definition and one had mild symptoms but did not meet the case definition. The incubation periods for the two cases were 30 minutes and 90 minutes. The durations of illness were 9.5 and 18 hours. One case reported dizziness, headache, red blotches on the body, facial flushing, and itching; the second case reported abdominal pain, red blotches on the face and body, and flushing of the face and chest. The patron with mild symptoms reported dizziness, stomach cramping, and diarrhea. No stool samples were submitted to MDH.

Due to the limited number of cases and non-ill controls, MDH was unable to conduct analyses to determine if food items were significantly associated with illness. However, all three ill patrons reported consuming seared or blackened tuna and the three non-ill group members did not eat the tuna.

During the environmental assessment, MDH EHS sanitarians spoke to establishment managers. A total of 15 units of tuna had been sold on the meal date and the restaurant had not received any additional complaints of illness from patrons. All cold-holding temperatures of tuna were below 41° F. There was no tuna left over from the September 7 meal date. Employees were educated on scombroid poisoning and safe cold-holding of fish.

This was a foodborne outbreak of scombroid poisoning associated with a restaurant in Lakeville. Tuna has been implicated in past scombroid outbreaks and was the likely source of illness in this outbreak.