

Taco Meat Identified as Source of Food Poisoning in Roosevelt Case

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DES MOINES, Iowa — The source of the meat that made dozens of teachers and staff ill following a luncheon at Roosevelt High School in October has been revealed.

The taco meat was purchased from the Windsor Heights Hy-Vee at 11:39 a.m. on October 21, then served at the luncheon about an hour later. A district spokesperson said the meat was left out on a table in a warming tray for the hour before it was served. School officials were forced to dismiss classes early on October 22nd after 58 employees were sickened.

The Polk County Health Department issued the findings of its investigation into the food poisoning incident. The department said the bacterium *Clostridium perfringens* was found in the taco meat and in stool samples from those who became sick. The report also noted “a specific point in the food preparation and handling process could not be identified as responsible.”

The Health Department said the bacteria often infects meats that are prepared in large batches and left warming for an extended of time. It adds food that is not served or refrigerated promptly is also susceptible to bacteria growth.

“We do know that this bacteria is one that is temperature sensitive,” said health department spokesperson Nola Ainger. “You could say the meat wasn’t cooked thoroughly and then it wasn’t reheated to a temperature thoroughly but we can’t speculate on that because there are so many periods of time where this could have happened.”

A spokesperson for Hy-Vee confirmed that school officials picked up the taco meat from the Windsor Heights store but claims it was prepared properly.

Hy-Vee Statement:

“Roosevelt High School officials picked up cooked taco meat from our Windsor Heights store the morning of Wednesday, Oct. 21. Our internal review indicates that the taco meat was prepared and stored properly while at our store. As you know, we can’t control how food is handled after it leaves our stores. We can confirm there had been no other reported illnesses from products purchased at the Windsor Heights Hy-Vee, and none of the employees who handled the taco meat had been recently ill during the time of the product’s preparation.

Our staff will continue to fully cooperate with Polk County Health Department officials as they carry out their investigation. We will implement any recommendations or direction that Iowa Department of Inspections and Appeals officials provide us following their investigation. We

take compliance and food safety seriously at our stores, and we have assured the department that we will continue to make food safety education and training a priority with our employees.”

Des Moines Schools’ Statement:

“We appreciate the health department’s prompt involvement and thorough investigation. We are relieved this is an isolated incidence of foodborne illness, that our teachers reported only short-term illnesses and that no students were involved.

The health department did not identify a specific point in time between the catered food preparation and the school’s food handling as being responsible for the presence of a bacteria. However, the district plans to take advantage of this opportunity to remind our schools and everyone about the importance of always following food safety guidelines.”

SOURCE: <http://whotv.com/2015/11/05/taco-meat-identified-as-source-of-food-poisoning-in-roosevelt-case/>