

# Health Department: Man's death likely connected to West Lafayette restaurant's food

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An investigation, which ended Wednesday, was conducted into Agave Azul by the Tippecanoe County Health Department and Coroner's Office, along with the Indiana State Department of Health, the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention and the U.S. Food and Drug Administration. It started after four people had reported gastrointestinal illnesses shortly after eating at the restaurant on Oct. 22, 2016. They had eaten dishes containing beef, chicken or pork.

One of the four people was hospitalized. Despite aggressive medical treatment, the man died on Oct. 26. Family identified the victim as 66-year-old Alexander Zdravich.

The Tippecanoe County Health Department said the symptoms and rapid onset of illness experienced by the sick people were consistent with infection due to *Clostridium perfringens*, a bacterium that can be harmful to humans. According to the CDC, it's one of the most common types of foodborne illness and it causes nearly 1 million illnesses per year. The bacteria is commonly found on raw meat and poultry and most commonly associated with food poisoning.

State health officials tested fecal samples taken from two of the victims, including Zdravich, which showed the presence of *Clostridium perfringens*.

The Tippecanoe County Coroner's Office determined Zdravich died from ischemic colitis due to *Clostridium perfringens*.

The Tippecanoe County Health Department conducted five inspections of Agave Azul from October 2016-February 2017. Those revealed several deficiencies in food handling practices. Those violations included keeping cooked food stored at inadequate temperatures, which is consistent with the growth of *Clostridium perfringens*.

Health department inspectors collected food samples prepared at Agave Azul on Oct. 27, 2016. Those were submitted to the FDA for analysis. The FDA was unable to confirm the presence of *Clostridium perfringens* in those samples. However, the FDA said significant delays in the testing process at the laboratory may have impacted the accuracy of the tests.

The Indiana State Department of Health concluded that the most likely source of infection was food consumed at Agave Azul.

After Zdravich became sick, the health department advised the owner, Jose Bustos, it was in the best interest of customers and public health and safety to do the following:

- 1.) Voluntarily close his restaurant until the investigation is complete.
- 2.) After TCHD inspectors collect samples of food for testing, discard all food at the restaurant.
- 3.) Thoroughly clean the restaurant.

According to Tippecanoe County Health Department Administrator Craig Rich, the business closed for cleaning for five days.

The Tippecanoe County Health Department concluded it is highly likely that the people who became ill contracted *Clostridium perfringens* through consumption of food prepared at Agave Azul.

Agave Azul remains open for business.

News 18 reached out Wednesday to owner Bustos, who said he's aware of the investigation and the results but refused to comment.

SOURCE: <http://www.wlfi.com/story/35394047/health-department-mans-death-likely-connected-to-west-lafayette-restaurants-food>