

Norovirus Gastroenteritis Associated with a Restaurant

May

Grant County

On May 30, 2017, the Minnesota Department of Health (MDH) foodborne illness hotline received a complaint of gastrointestinal illness among a group of extended family members who had eaten dinner at a restaurant in Elbow Lake on May 25. The group reported no other recent common exposures. Minnesota Department of Health Environmental Health (EH) was contacted, and an investigation was initiated immediately.

MDH EH sanitarians visited the restaurant on May 30 to evaluate food preparation and handling procedures, gather additional patron contact information from May 30, and interview food workers. A case was defined as a restaurant patron who developed vomiting or diarrhea (≥ 3 loose stools in a 24-

hour period) after eating food from the restaurant. Stool specimen collect kits were sent to cases and ill employees.

Nine patrons were interviewed, and six (67%) met the case definition. One patron reported an illness that did not meet the case definition and was excluded from further analysis. Illness was identified among the complaint group (four cases) and patrons identified through credit card receipts (two cases). The median incubation period for cases was 35 hours (range, 18 to 61 hours). All six cases reported vomiting, four (67%) reported diarrhea, three (50%) reported cramps, and none reported fever or bloody stools. The median duration of illness was 27.5 hours (range, 7 hours to 87 hours). One ill patron submitted a stool specimens to the MDH PHL, and the specimen was positive for norovirus GI.P2-GI.2.

Cases reported consuming a variety of foods including burgers, chicken strips, Philly cheesesteak sandwich, shrimp, and side salad. The small number of non-ill controls precluded a meaningful statistical analysis.

MDH EH sanitarians interviewed 26 restaurant employees, and 3 reported recent gastrointestinal illness. A cook developed diarrhea on May 15 and recovered on May 18. A line cook developed vomiting and fever on May 24 and recovered on May 24. A server developed vomiting, diarrhea, and fever on May 27 and recovered on May 29. The sanitarians discussed the importance of handwashing and appropriate glove use for the prevention of norovirus transmission, ordered the restaurant to sanitize all food contact surfaces, instructed management to screen employees for vomiting and diarrhea at the beginning of each shift, and excluded all employees with vomiting and/or diarrhea from work until 72 hours after the resolution of symptoms.

This was a foodborne outbreak of norovirus gastroenteritis associated with a restaurant in Elbow Lake. A vehicle was not identified. The source of contamination was likely an infected food worker.