

Gastroenteritis Associated with a Restaurant

December

Hennepin County

On January 3, 2018, the Minnesota Department of Health (MDH) Foodborne Disease Unit contacted Hennepin County Human Services and Public Health (HCPH) Epidemiology after they received a complaint of gastrointestinal illness from a party of three, living in two separate households that ate at a restaurant in the Longfellow neighborhood of Minneapolis, Minnesota on December 27, 2017. The Minneapolis Health Department (MHD) was notified and an investigation was initiated.

MHD sanitarians visited the restaurant on January 4 to initiate employee illness screening, evaluate food preparation and handling procedures, implement norovirus interventions, interview food workers about illness history and work duties, and gather additional patron contact information from December 27.

HCPH Epidemiology staff interviewed additional restaurant patrons identified from credit card receipts from December 27. A case was defined as a restaurant patron who subsequently developed vomiting and/or diarrhea (≥ 3 loose stools in a 24-hour period).

Eight patrons were interviewed from the complaint or from a list of patrons obtained from credit card receipts from the implicated meal date. Four patrons (50%) met the case definition. Three cases (75%)

were female, with a median age of 54.5 years (range, 54 to 55 years). All cases reported diarrhea and stomach cramps, two (50%) vomiting, and one (25%) fever. The median incubation period was 32 hours (range, 30 to 36 hours). The median duration of illness for three cases who had recovered at the time of interview was 90 hours (range, 39 to 125 hours). No cases were hospitalized or died, and none submitted a stool specimen to MDH.

Cases reported eating a variety of items from the menu, including “nacho totchos” and onion ring appetizers, a spring salad, “The Islander” burger, and beer, wine, and soda for beverages. No food item was significantly associated with illness. Four controls were interviewed.

MHD sanitarians visited the restaurant on January 4 to conduct environmental assessments, provide norovirus interventions, initiate employee illness screening, and interview restaurant employees. Illness histories and job duty information were obtained from all 55 restaurant employees. Seven employees reported recent gastrointestinal illness, with symptoms including diarrhea, vomiting, nausea, stomach cramping, and/or fever. Onset dates for these illnesses ranged from December 6, 2017 through January 1, 2018. One ill employee reported working while symptomatic. Seven employees reported that a specific employee vomited in the restroom at the restaurant and was sent home on December 28. Another two employees reported a vomiting incident around the same time period but did not name a specific employee or date. No employees submitted a stool specimen to MDH for testing. An employee illness screening log was initiated on January 4 and remained in place until January 16. The restaurant did not report any further employee illness or patron illness complaints.

This was a foodborne outbreak of gastroenteritis associated with a restaurant in the Longfellow neighborhood of Minneapolis. While an etiology was not confirmed, the incubation periods and symptoms were most characteristic of norovirus gastroenteritis. A specific outbreak vehicle was not identified, but the source of the outbreak likely was one or more ill or recently ill food workers.