

Shiga Toxin-Producing *E. coli* O26 Infections Associated with a Restaurant

July

Scott County

On July 29, 2020, the Minnesota Department of Health (MDH) Public Health Laboratory (PHL) determined that two clinical Shiga toxin-producing *E. coli* (STEC) isolates submitted through routine surveillance were one allele

different from each other by whole genome sequencing (WGS). Only one case had been interviewed by the time the cluster was identified.

On August 4, the second case was interviewed, and a review of the interviews found that both cases had eaten at the same restaurant in Shakopee during the week before illness onset. MDH Environmental Health (EH) was contacted, and an investigation was initiated.

A case was defined as a person who had a stool specimen test positive for the outbreak strain of STEC O26:H11, with a specimen collection date from July 1 to July 31.

MDH EH sanitarians visited the restaurant on August 6 to assess recent employee illness, review food handling and preparation procedures, and assess potential sources of cross-contamination for menu items ordered by the cases.

Two cases were identified, both of whom were part of the initial WGS cluster identified by the MDH PHL. One case ate at the restaurant on July 10 and became ill on July 12, and the other case ate at the restaurant multiple times in the week prior to his illness onset on July 12. Menu items eaten by the cases included tacos al pastor with cilantro and tomato, steak street tacos, and shrimp tacos; all tacos included corn tortillas, cilantro, onion, salsa, and lime.

The median age of cases was 18 years (range, 16 to 20 years), and both were male. One case had ongoing symptoms at the time of interview; the other case had illness symptoms that lasted for 10 days. Neither case was hospitalized or died.

The initial environmental assessment was conducted on August 6 and identified issues related to cold holding and cooking temperatures. A prep cooler was measured at 50-51° F, and foods stored inside were discarded, including green salsa, grilled onions, and ceviche. A three-door cooler was also measured at 43-44° F. Additionally, the restaurant did not have a working food thermometer, though they did have a fact sheet posted and a sanitarian observed proper cooking temperatures. Education was provided on proper cleaning procedures and preventing cross-contamination.

A follow-up inspection was conducted on August 12. The prep and three-door coolers were measured at appropriate temperatures (below 41° F). The restaurant had also purchased a food thermometer and a larger prep cooler.

This was an outbreak of STEC O26:H11 infections associated with a restaurant. The outbreak vehicle was not identified.