

Scombroid Poisoning Associated with Commercially Distributed Tuna

April

Washington County

On April 16, 2020, the Minnesota Department of Health (MDH) foodborne and waterborne illness hotline received a complaint of illness among two individuals from the same household after consuming ahi tuna steaks purchased from a grocery store in Oakdale. Each individual had a tuna steak on April 10 (no illness) and a second tuna steak on April 11. The symptoms and incubations reported were consistent with scombroid poisoning. The Minnesota Department of Agriculture (MDA) was notified.

Callers to the MDH foodborne and waterborne illness hotline are interviewed with a standard questionnaire that, when relevant, includes symptoms consistent with scombroid poisoning and collects information on brand and other details for retail food products.

A case was defined as a grocery store patron who developed symptoms consistent with histamine toxicosis (i.e., rash, headache, dizziness, nausea, vomiting, diarrhea, facial flushing and sweating, itching skin, and tingling and burning sensations around the mouth) within 3 hours of eating a tuna item.

MDA notified the United States Food and Drug Administration (FDA).

Two cases were identified, both from the original complaint. The individuals were from the same household; they consumed one tuna steak on April 10 for dinner (there were no leftovers) and consumed another steak on April 11 for lunch. Incubation periods from the April 11 meal were 0 minutes and 30 minutes. Both reported red/flushed face, swollen face, rash or hives, dry mouth, difficulty swallowing, thirst, nausea, abdominal pain, and racing heart.

The cases reported that the ahi tuna steaks were purchased from the fresh seafood display at the grocery store in Oakdale. They purchased two filets/steaks on April 10 around 1:30 p.m.

Purchase information and complaint details were forwarded to MDA. MDA staff were unable to visit the store due to a state stay-at-home order for the COVID-19 pandemic; however, they determined that the tuna was sourced from outside of Minnesota and forwarded the information to FDA for further follow-up.

This was a foodborne outbreak of scombroid fish poisoning associated with ahi tuna steaks from a grocery chain. The source of temperature abuse was unknown.