

Miguel's Cocina in 4S Ranch reopens after E. coli outbreak forced voluntary closure

At least 10 people had to be hospitalized, including four children, according to the County of San Diego's Health and Human Services Agency

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Miguel's Cocina in San Diego's 4S Ranch neighborhood returned to normal operations on Saturday, after voluntarily closing its doors in response to an E. coli outbreak that sickened at least 35 people, including 10 who had to be hospitalized.

The restaurant was closed for 10 days and had a "soft" reopening Friday night. The news of the soft opening was confirmed Friday evening by San Diego County Health and Human Services Agency spokesperson Tim McLain.

Since its voluntary closure, the restaurant has been disinfected, all food at the restaurant has been replaced and staff have been given food handling training and testing, McLain said.

Scott St. Martin, who describes himself as a frequent customer of Miguel's, dined at the restaurant on Saturday, saying that now is the safest time to go.

"If the restaurant and County Health have their eyes on everything, and they're making sure everything is clean and washed properly and prepared to temperature properly, I'd imagine it would be the safest time to eat there when there's the most scrutiny on the place," he said.

Those who fell ill, or their families, reported eating at Miguel's 4S Ranch location from Oct. 6 to Oct. 18 and developed symptoms from Oct. 13 to Oct. 19, according to the HHSA.

County health officials are still investigating the specific food items that were the source of the Shiga-toxin-producing E. coli (STEC) at the restaurant.

The number of E. coli cases and hospitalizations linked to the outbreak at Miguel's has increased since the first was reported and could continue to do so. At least one of the cases has developed into the more severe complication of the infection called hemolytic uremic syndrome.

"People who visited the restaurant and are feeling ill should see their doctor as soon as possible," Wilma J. Wooten, M.D., M.P.H., county public health officer, told the public last week.

Brigantine Restaurants is the parent company of Miguel's Cocina 4S Ranch. Group President of The Brigantine, Mike Morton Jr., released the following statement shortly after the E. coli outbreak was confirmed.

"At this time, no link has been made to the other 20 facilities operated by The Brigantine Restaurants around San Diego County," Morton Jr. said.

Dr. Richard Moon with Kaiser Permanente said many people may not realize they have contracted E. coli, but it can be very bad in a specific group of people.

"A small portion — especially the very young, the very old or those with chronic medical conditions — are at risk of developing more severe symptoms like fever, nausea and vomiting that you can't keep up with fluid intake or decreased urine production and confusion and lethargy," Moon said.

E. Coli (STEC) Symptoms

People infected with STEC start feeling ill three to four days after eating or drinking something containing the bacteria. Illnesses can begin anywhere from 1 to 10 days after exposure, the HHSA says.

The HHSA says symptoms vary from person to person but often include:

- Severe abdominal cramping
- Watery or bloody diarrhea (3 or more loose stools in a 24-hour period)
- Vomiting

Symptoms can occur with or without a fever, although not usually very high (less than 101°F/38.5°C). People usually get better within 5 to 7 days. Some

infections are mild but others are tough and even life-threatening, according to the HHSA.

If you have these symptoms, contact your doctor immediately, the HHSA says. This is especially true if you have diarrhea that lasts for more than three days or diarrhea, accompanied by a fever higher than 102°F or bloody stools, or vomiting so much that you cannot keep liquids down and pass very little urine, the HHSA says.

Lawsuits

At least two patients linked to the outbreak have filed lawsuits against Brigantine Restaurants after falling sick from the outbreak.

The first was filed on Oct. 26. The plaintiff ate at Miguel's on Oct. 12, the complaint states. She ate chips, rice, guacamole and drank iced tea, then a few days later began suffering from "extreme abdominal pain, diarrhea and nausea, and noticed a significant amount of blood in her stool," leading her to seek medical treatment on Oct. 17.

Doctors later diagnosed her with Shiga toxin-producing E.coli, according to the complaint, which states she's since been discharged from the hospital but continues to experience some symptoms.

Ron Simon, the plaintiff's attorney, said in a statement, "The very fact that the illnesses were contracted over a six-day period is disturbing. It indicates that E. coli was present in the kitchen at Miguel's Cocina for a protracted period of time. We will use discovery in this litigation to identify what went wrong and to make sure this does not happen again."

The second lawsuit was filed the next day, on Oct. 27. Denis Bisson said he fell ill after eating mushroom, chicken, and shrimp fajitas, [according to his attorney](#).

"How do you trust eating out anywhere?" Bisson said. "We love sushi, and it's like, well, that's not cooked. And that scares me, quite frankly. You really put your trust in these restaurants to make sure they're following good procedures. And unfortunately, to see a big chain like this have this kind of thing happen and for so long to so many people, it makes you wonder, what's going on? Are there corners being cut? "