

Harris County Health Department closes Humble restaurant after customers get sick

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ATASCOCITA, Texas — The Harris County Health Department has temporarily closed an Humble restaurant after multiple patrons reported being sickened over Father's Day weekend.

The health department said it warned Iguana Joe's about critical violations and how to fix them, but the restaurant didn't listen so it had no choice but to close the place down at 9 a.m. Tuesday.

"The four major problems that they have right now is cold/hot hold violations. It's how they cool their product after they've heated it up -- they've cooked it, and now they need to cool it down. And food contact surfaces—you have to remember there are danger zones in foods -- so between 41 and 135 degrees is when bacteria grows," said Harris County Environmental Public Health Services Director Michael Schaffer.

For example, health officials said the employees weren't cooling the batches of beef, chicken and guacamole at the proper temperatures. However, it's not clear what made people sick.

The health department said all of Iguana Joe's employees will be retrained.

Iguana Joe's released a statement late Monday apologizing for what it called an "unforeseen incident."

"We are working diligently with the Harris County Health department and will do everything possible to find the culprit of these regretful circumstances," the statement said.

The health department launched an investigation after at least a dozen people, including children, had symptoms of food poisoning after eating at Iguana Joe's. The patrons blamed the restaurant for making them sick.

"I think it was a good decision until they find out what has made so many people sick," said Debbie Rodriguez.

Her son ended up in the hospital with salmonella after eating at Iguana Joe's. 9-year old Ashton is now out of the hospital.

"I think now they understand that the story was a lot bigger than they initially thought," Rodriguez said.

Allison Duhon Hill and six other people in her family got sick too.

"We were all trying to decide was it the fajitas, was it the sour cream, was it the salsa because we all kind of ate different things," Hill said. "I'm sure after this incident they will probably be the safest place to eat."