

DU PAGE COUNTY HEALTH DEPARTMENT INVESTIGATES CAUSE OF CLUSTER OF GASTROINTESTINAL ILLNESSES IN DU PAGE COUNTY

Mon June 17, 2013

The DuPage County Health Department is investigating the cause of a cluster of gastrointestinal illnesses primarily among customers of Los Burritos Mexicanos located at 1015 E. Saint Charles Road in Lombard. Restaurant ownership and staff have been cooperating with health officials, and the Lombard restaurant has been closed pending further results of the investigation.

As of the morning of June 17, the health department is investigating several reports of illness possibly associated with food consumption from this Los Burritos Mexicanos restaurant location. To date, four cases of *E. coli* O157:H7 have been laboratory confirmed. Two cases had been hospitalized and discharged, two cases have not required hospital admission; all are recovering at home.

It has been determined that some of the illnesses were caused by bacteria called Shiga toxin-producing *E. coli* O157:H7 (STEC O157:H7). Infection with *E. coli* O157:H7 causes diarrhea, often bloody. Although most healthy adults can recover completely within a week, some people can develop severe disease, including hemolytic uremic syndrome (HUS), a form of kidney failure. HUS is most likely to occur in young children and the elderly. The investigation is ongoing and the health department is working closely with the Illinois Department of Public Health and healthcare professionals toward prevention and control of any further disease transmission.

Persons who exhibit any of the symptoms of *E. coli* O157:H7 are advised to contact their physician to arrange for appropriate testing and treatment, as indicated. Antibiotics should not be used to treat this infection. There is no evidence that treatment with antibiotics is helpful, and taking antibiotics may increase the risk of hemolytic uremic syndrome (HUS). Before using antidiarrheal agents such as loperamide (Imodium[®]) or diphenoxylate with atropine (Lomotil[®]), contact your physician, since antidiarrheal agents can prolong illness in persons with *E. coli* O157:H7, and should be avoided.

E. coli O157:H7 can be transmitted through contaminated food or water or from one person to another. While the number of organisms required to cause disease is not known, it is suspected to be very small.

The bacterium is present in the stools of infected persons, and it can be passed from one person to another if hygiene and hand washing habits are inadequate. This is particularly likely to occur among toddlers who are not fully toilet trained. Family members and playmates of such children

are at high risk of becoming infected. Bacteria are usually cleared from the stools within a week after the diarrhea resolves. However, in some cases, particularly in young children, the organism may persist in the stool for weeks after the diarrhea has resolved.

If you or a family member has eaten at the Los Burritos Mexicanos restaurant in Lombard between May 24 and June 14 and developed diarrheal illness within two to 10 days after eating, promptly consult with your physician and call and report the illness to the DuPage County Health Department at (630) 221-7040 between 8am and 4:30pm; for after-hours concerns, call (630) 682-7400. More information on *E. coli* O157:H7 is available at www.idph.state.il.us/public/hb/hbecoli.htm.

DuPage County Health Department receives approximately ten reports of Shiga toxin-producing *E. coli* O157:H7 (STEC O157:H7) each year in DuPage County. Every year, about 100 laboratory confirmed cases of STEC O157:H7 are reported in Illinois. Many mild cases are not diagnosed or reported so the number may be higher.