

**Outbreak of Gastroenteritis Associated with La Familia Café & Cantina —
Douglas County, June 2008**



Investigation by:

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Background

On June 30, 2008, the Kansas Department of Health and Environment (KDHE) was notified of a possible outbreak of gastrointestinal illness among individuals that shared a meal from La Familia Café & Cantina, 735 New Hampshire, Lawrence, KS, 66044. The preliminary report revealed that three individuals from two different households ate food prepared at the restaurant on the evening of June 28, and became ill the following morning with vomiting, diarrhea, and other gastrointestinal symptoms. In response to this report, an outbreak investigation was initiated by the Lawrence-Douglas County Health Department (LDCHD) and KDHE.

Key Findings

A food inspection of the establishment was conducted on July 1. The inspection revealed five critical violations: (1) improper hand washing procedure; (2) inconvenient hand washing facility location; (3) inadequate level of chemical sanitizer in mechanical warewashing equipment; (4) unclean food contact surfaces; and (5) eating or drinking in a non-designated area.

Restaurant employees were surveyed for recent illness. No employees reported experiencing gastrointestinal symptoms from June 25 to July 2.

None of the three ill complainants visited a physician, and no stool or food specimens were collected for laboratory analysis. All recovered from their illness within 24 hours of onset; precise onset and recovery times were not obtained.

Conclusion and Recommendations

Although the two households affected reported no other common exposures, the illness cannot be conclusively linked to the shared restaurant meal.

The complainants' clinical histories suggest their illness was caused by norovirus. Noroviruses may be transmitted via the fecal-oral route through food that has been contaminated by the hands of an ill food handler. Noroviruses are highly contagious and as few as 10 viral particles may be sufficient to cause infection. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) estimate that at least 50% of all foodborne outbreaks of gastroenteritis are attributed to noroviruses. Simple measures, including correct handling of cold foods, strict hand washing after using the bathroom and before handling food items, and excluding employees with gastrointestinal illness from food handling may substantially reduce foodborne transmission of noroviruses.

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