

Gastroenteritis Outbreak Associated with Taco Grande Restaurant – Ellis County, December 2011



Background

On December 14, 2011, at approximately 4:30 p.m., the Kansas Department of Agriculture (KDA) received a foodborne illness complaint via telephone. The caller stated that she and her daughter became ill with gastrointestinal symptoms after dining together at Taco Grande, a fast food restaurant at 412 E 23rd Street, Hays, Kansas, and was aware of others who experienced symptoms after eating there. The Kansas Department of Health and Environment (KDHE) was notified of the complaint the following morning at 9:53 a.m., and notified the Ellis County Health Department (ECHD). ECHD began the outbreak investigation that afternoon by interviewing the complainant, who provided contact information for five additional individuals who ate at the same restaurant.

Methods

Suspect cases were interviewed by telephone. A case was defined as any individual experiencing vomiting and/or diarrhea within 48 hours of eating at the restaurant from December 9 through December 11, 2011.

The inspection of the fast food restaurant was conducted on December 15, 2011, at 2:30 p.m. Employee surveys were distributed to identify ill food handlers and their specific food handling duties.

Results

Six suspect cases were identified; five were interviewed, and one did not return repeated telephone calls. The five individuals represented three separate households: one pair of individuals who dined together on December 11, another pair that dined together on December 9, and one individual who also dined on December 9. All were residents of Ellis County.

The ages of cases ranged from 18 to 68 years (median age, 23 years). Three cases were male.

All individuals reported vomiting, and two individuals also reported diarrhea (Table 1.). The median incubation period was 35 hours from the time of meal (range, 15 to 38 hours). The duration of illness was reported for three individuals; it ranged from approximately four to six days (median 4.8 days).

Table 1: Symptoms Reported among Cases – Ellis County Gastroenteritis Outbreak Associated with Taco Grande Restaurant, November 2011 (n=5).

Symptom	# of Cases / Total Reporting	% of Cases
Vomiting	5/5	100
Nausea	5/5	100
Abdominal Pain	4/5	100
Muscle Aches	5/5	100
Chills	4/5	80
Fever	3/5	60
Diarrhea	2/5	40

No physician visits were reported, and no stool specimens were collected.

No common exposures other than the restaurant were reported among the three households. All individuals consumed fountain drinks with ice, and different menu items; however, because each menu item contained similar ingredients, illnesses could not be conclusively linked to an item.

The restaurant inspection by KDA revealed one critical violation — improper cooling times were observed. Of the fifteen employee surveys returned to KDHE, two employees reported diarrhea on December 10, but no other symptoms of gastrointestinal illness.

Conclusions

No definitive diagnosis was obtained for the five cases. Although the restaurant was associated with illness, neither the etiology of the outbreak nor the vehicle of transmission could be determined.

The restaurant inspection occurred in a timely manner and education was provided to the manager and employees on proper cooling procedures.

The investigation could have been assisted by the collection of stool specimens. Specimen kits were not immediately available to offer to the interviewed cases. After kits were shipped, the cases declined to obtain them from ECHD. KDHE encourages local health departments to keep a

supply of stool specimen kits on hand so that they may be distributed immediately following a foodborne illness complaint.

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