

Tips

The Food Safety Newsletter for Brown, Nicollet, Watonwan and Cottonwood Counties

Brown-Nicollet Environmental Health

322 South Minnesota Avenue St. Peter, MN 56082

Phone 507.934.4140 Fax 507.934.8958

Website: co.nicollet.mn.us

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Thank You

Meeting with most of you last month was energizing! We always learn as much from all of you, as we hope you learn from us. You might think...what more is there we can do about reporting foodborne illness? We have trained our employees, we have an “EMPLOYEE Illness Policy” in place...what more can we do? But then, at the meetings



this November, we invited a guest speaker, Brad Krier, Minnesota Department of Health Regional Epidemiologist. Brad re-enforced why reporting foodborne illness complaints is so important. He also helped us understand the importance of

EXCLUDING ill employees (symptoms of vomiting or diarrhea) and the science behind this requirement.

So this year, to help us all remember, our focus during annual inspections will be to ensure you and your staff understand the required reporting procedures and have the new posters and phone number

for reporting. CHECK OUT THE NEW INFORMATION ON OUR WEBSITE at [www.co.nicollet.mn.us/Licensed Establishment Info/Record It...Report It](http://www.co.nicollet.mn.us/LicensedEstablishmentInfo/RecordIt...ReportIt)



Norovirus: The Holiday ‘gift’ nobody wants, but many get

Protect yourself, and others with proper handwashing, avoiding food preparation when you are ill.

“Tis the season of giving,” but too many Minnesotans this time of year are giving and receiving something nobody wants: norovirus infection – and the nasty symptoms that come with the illness.

Noroviruses are a group of viruses that can cause inflammation of the stomach and intestines, leading to vomiting, diarrhea and stomach cramping. Other symptoms can include low-grade fever or chills, headache, and muscle aches.

Noroviruses are very contagious and are the leading cause of foodborne illness outbreaks in Minnesota, infecting thousands of people each year. Found in the stool (feces) or vomit of infected people, the viruses are transferred to food, water or surfaces by the hands of infected people who have not washed adequately after using the bathroom.

November through January is the peak time of year for norovirus infections in Minnesota. It’s not unusual to see a spike in cases around the holidays, according to foodborne disease specialists at the Minnesota Department of Health (MDH). People become infected with norovirus by:

- Eating food or drinking liquids contaminated or prepared by an infected person.

- Touching contaminated surfaces or objects and then touching their mouth or eating without washing their hands first.

Things you can do to prevent Norovirus Illness:

- **Wash your hands with warm, soapy water for 20 seconds:**
 - After using the bathroom.
 - After changing diapers.
 - Before preparing foods
 - Before eating
- **Wash your hands more often when someone in your household is sick.**
- **Clean and disinfect surfaces with a household bleach solution immediately after vomiting or diarrheal accidents.**
- **Avoid preparing food for others while you have symptoms and for at least three days after you recover.**

“If everyone followed these guidelines diligently, we could eliminate the majority of the norovirus outbreaks in Minnesota,” said Dr. Kirk Smith, Foodborne Disease Supervisor at MDH. “The season of giving should also be the season of good handwashing,” he said.

Symptoms of norovirus usually begin 1 or 2 days after ingesting the virus, but may appear as early as 12 hours after exposure. The illness typically comes on suddenly. The infected person may feel

very sick and vomit often, sometimes without warning, many times a day. Sometimes people infected with norovirus have no symptoms at all, but can still pass the virus to others.

Most people recover in 1 or 2 days and have no long-term health effects. However, dehydration can be a concern in the very young, the elderly, or people with weakened immune systems. Occasionally infected people may experience milder symptoms for a week or more. It is important to remember that even after people

recover they still remain infectious to others for several days.

If you develop norovirus symptoms, drink plenty of fluids so you don't become dehydrated, wash your hands often, don't prepare food for others, and contact your health care provider.

For more information on norovirus, visit the MDH website at: <http://www.health.state.mn.us/divs/idepc/diseases/norovirus/index.html>

Source: MDH



Handwashing is not Rocket Science

Top Ten Food Safety Tips place handwashing at the top of the list. Here are some ways to get the personal hygiene and handwashing message through to your food workers:

- Show them the proper handwashing method.
- Keep hand wash stations clean and stocked with soap and paper towels
- Put a poster on the wall at the hand wash station showing the correct handwashing technique,
- Supply utensils, and gloves so workers wont touch ready-to-eat foods with their hands



Worker Health & Hygiene Outcomes

Study: Biggest factor in restaurant-associated food outbreaks is workers

Food worker health and hygiene was the most common contributing factor in foodborne disease outbreaks associated with eating at restaurants and delicatessens, followed by improper food preparation practices, a study in the *Journal of Food Protection* found.

The authors analyzed data from the 457 foodborne illness outbreaks, defined as an incident where two or more persons experienced similar diseases from ingestion of a common food, reported in 2006 and 2007 at Foodborne Disease Active Surveillance Network (FoodNet) sites, which at the time comprised about 15% of the US population. A total of 300 (66%) of the outbreaks were associated with restaurants and delicatessens, with 295 (98%) of the reports listing at least one contributing factor.

A single etiologic agent was identified in 257 of the restaurant-associated outbreaks, with norovirus by

far the most common, causing 154 (60%) of them; worker health and hygiene was listed as a contributing factor in 137 (89%) of these.

Among all the single-etiology outbreaks, worker health and hygiene was listed as a contributing factor in 165 (64%). Food preparation factors, such as inadequate cleaning of equipment and improper storage, were reported in 88 (34%), and contamination of foods before their arrival at restaurants was reported in 56 (22%).

Food handling by workers who were infected or were carriers of a pathogen and workers' bare-handed contact with food were the top factors reported among handler-associated contamination. The authors conclude that more work is needed to educate restaurant workers not to work when they are ill, but they note the challenge inherent in the fact that paid sick leave is uncommon in the food industry.

Source: November *J Food Protect*: <http://www.cidrap.umn.edu/news-perspective/2013/11/news-scan-nov-13-2013>

