Food Safety Scoop

Brought to you by the Yavapai County Food Safety Industry Council

Volume 1, Issue 1 November 2015

Special Points of Interest

- What is Norovirus?
- How Do People Get Norovirus?
- How Can Norovirus be Prevented?
- What Should I do if I am Diagnosed with Norovirus?
- Test your Norovirus Knowledge and take our Quiz

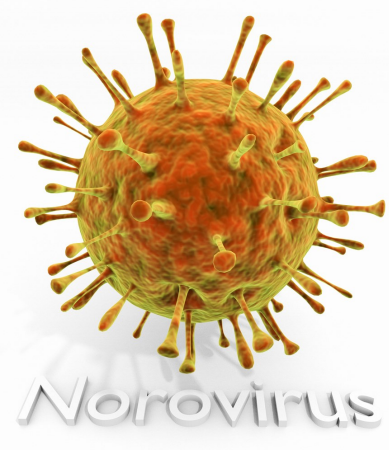
This newsletter is brought to you by the Yavapai county Food Safety Industry Council, which is a joint collaboration between the Yavapai County Community Health Services and the University of Arizona Cooperative Extension.

The FSIC meets bimonthly to discuss issues in the food service industry and ways to bring food safety information to the public.

For more information, please call 928-445-6590 or visit our website at Extension.arizona.edu/Yavapai/

What is Norovirus?

When people hear the words "food borne illness", they often think of a bacteria such as E.coli or Salmonella, when in fact they are more likely to be infected with a virus.



In the US, Norovirus is the leading cause of illness from contaminated food or water. It is highly contagious and spreads quickly in groups of people. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention estimates that noroviruses cause 19-21 million illnesses annually, which accounts for 58% of all foodborne illnesses! This number could be significantly higher, as most cases go unreported due to the quick recovery time healthy individuals often experience. It is often confused with the "24 hour flu" when in fact there is no such thing as a 24-hour flu. Most likely these individuals have been infected with a norovirus strain.

Also referred to as gastroenteritis, food poisoning and winter vomiting disease, norovirus is actually a group of viruses that often cause explosive vomiting, watery, non-bloody diarrhea with abdominal cramps and nausea. Vomiting and diarrhea often occur simultaneously and the onset may be extremely sudden. Headache, low-grade fever, chills and muscle aches may also occur.

Persons of all ages are at risk for infection, but young children, pregnant woman, older adults and persons with weakened immune systems may have more severe reactions.

How Do People Get Norovirus?

The most common cause of norovirus outbreaks in the US has been associated with consumption of ready to eat foods that have been contaminated by ill food workers. Transmission occurs via the fecal-oral route (or vomit). Viral particles are shed in the infected individual's stool even before the onset of symptoms and up to two weeks after symptoms have gone. There have been many norovirus outbreaks in areas where large populations are in close quarters such as schools, prisons, hospitals, college campuses and cruise ships.

Shellfish harvested from contaminated water is another common route of transmission and recent evidence shows that the particles can be transmitted in the air.

How Can Norovirus Be Prevented?

Due to the large number of viral particles contagious individuals shed, along with the small dose needed to cause infections, personal hygiene and hand washing must be a priority for all food workers. This is also why bare hand contact with ready to eat foods is not allowed. Ready to eat foods are those foods which are not going to be cooked (a viral kill step) before being consumed, for example salads, raw produce, and sandwiches. Use of gloves, deli paper, tongs, etc. when handling such foods is required. Proper hand washing techniques are also pertinent to remove viral particles from the hands and wrists. Hand should be washed frequently, especially after going to the bathroom, sneezing or coughing, touching exposed body parts, when changing work tasks and prior to putting on gloves. Proper hand washing involves use of hot water and soap and scrubbing your hands for 15-20 seconds, making sure to scrub all parts of the hands, wrists, fingers and finger nails.

Norovirus particles can survive on surfaces, such as door knobs and light switches, for up to 4 weeks. It is recommended to clean surfaces with a diluted bleach solution of one part bleach and 9 parts water. Be sure to allow surfaces to air dry.

What Should I Do If I am Diagnosed With Norovirus?

Because it is highly contagious, food workers should stay home from work if they have norovirus symptoms. Norovirus is considered a "Big5" illness along with Salmonella, Shigella, E.Coli and Hepatitis A. If a worker has been diagnosed with any of these diseases, they are considered to be "excluded" from the food establishment in which they work. Only after they receive written medical clearance from a doctor will they be allowed to return to work. It is of upmost importance to notify your employer if you or someone in your household has been diagnosed with Norovirus. Your employer will then notify the local Health Department. Once you are cleared to return to work, it is still extremely important to follow good personal hygiene practices as well as continuing to be diligent on hand washing. You can prevent the spread of this debilitating virus by following these simple procedures.

"It is of upmost importance to notify your employer if you or someone in your household has been diagnosed with Norovirus."

Quiz

1. Norovirus is most often spread through…
   A. Undercooked Ground Beef
   B. Improper Cooling Procedures
   C. Infected Food Workers
   D. Cockroaches

2. Which of the following are considered "ready to eat foods"?
   A. Deli Sandwich
   B. Chopped Salad
   C. Raw Chicken Breast
   D. Cooked Hotdog

3. How many people are estimated to be infected with Norovirus in the US in one year?
   A. 1-2 million
   B. 5-10 million
   C. 10-15 million
   D. 19-20 million

4. True or False?
   Norovirus is the leading cause of illness from contaminated food or water.

5. When a worker is diagnosed with Norovirus, which of the following are true?
   A. They are Excluded from the workplace.
   B. The Health department should be notified.
   C. They need medical clearance to return to work
   D. All of the above

Answers: 1. C 2. A,B,D 3. D 4. T 5. D

Resources: 1. FDA. Bad Bug Book, Foodborne Pathogenic Microorganisms and Natural Toxins. 2nd edition. "Noroviruses." 2012
2. Knechtges, Paul L. *Food Safety Theory and Practice*. Burlington, MA: Jones & Bartlett Learning, 2012. Print.
3. FDA 2013 Food Code

Issued in furtherance of Cooperative Extension work, acts of May 8 and June 30, 1914, in cooperation with the U.S. Department of Agriculture, Jeffery C. Silvertooth, Associate Dean & Director, Economic Development & Extension, College of Agriculture and Life Sciences, The University of Arizona. The University of Arizona is an equal opportunity, affirmative action institution. The University does not discriminate on the basis of race, color, religion, sex, national origin, age, disability, veteran status, or sexual orientation in its programs and activities.