

Tips

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

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Let's Come Together!

It's that time of year again! No, I'm not talking about Halloween, Thanksgiving, Christmas, or even deer hunting season. It's time to start planning to attend one of our Annual Licensing Meetings in November!

Our office looks forward to these meetings every year, as it gives us another opportunity to be face to face with all of you to discuss hot topics, answer any questions that you may have, and continue building our partnerships together!

Please plan on attending one of our schedule meetings this year. The schedule for our Annual Licensing Meetings is included in this Newsletter, will be posted on our Facebook page, will be on our calendar on our website, and a reminder will be mailed out to you soon.



Norovirus

Not only is it the time of year for our Annual Licensing Meetings, it's also the time of year when we start to see more cases of norovirus. This presents an issue for food establishments, as norovirus is the number one cause of foodborne illness in Minnesota. To prepare for norovirus season, our office is asking that you be vigilant with two very important food safety risk factors:

Employee health

Now is a good time to remind your employees of their reporting and exclusion requirements as it relates to employee illness. The last thing you want is to have an ill food employee working and end up with a foodborne illness outbreak. Please make sure you have the following employee illness materials in place and that your staff is knowledgeable with all of these documents:

- Employee Illness Reporting Policy
- Employee Illness Reporting Agreements
- Employee Illness Log

Handwashing

Make sure you are monitoring handwashing at your establishment and are making sure that employees are washing their hands properly. To help prevent the spread of norovirus, employees must wash their hands:

- After using the restroom, AND
- Before eating, preparing, or handling food.

Handwashing is of vital importance as norovirus can be found in your vomit or poop even before you start feeling sick. The virus can stay in your poop for 2 weeks or more after you feel better. It is important to continue washing your hands often during this time.

You can use alcohol-based hand sanitizers in addition to hand washing. But, you should not use hand sanitizer as a substitute for washing your hands with soap and water. Hand sanitizers aren't as effective as washing hands with soap and water at removing norovirus particles.

Please Wash Your Hands

NOROVIRUS

What is norovirus?

Noroviruses are a group of viruses (previously known as Norwalk-like viruses) that can cause gastroenteritis, an inflammation of the stomach and intestines. Norovirus is the leading cause of foodborne illness outbreaks in Minnesota.

This infection is often mistakenly referred to as the "stomach flu". Norovirus is not related to the flu (influenza), which is a common respiratory illness caused by the influenza virus.

What are the symptoms?

Common symptoms of norovirus infection include vomiting, diarrhea, and stomach cramping. Less common symptoms can include low-grade fever or chills, headache, and muscle aches. Symptoms 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.

How long does it last?

Most people recover in 1 or 2 days and have no long-term health effects. 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.

How is it spread?

Noroviruses are very contagious. They are found in the stool (feces) or vomit of infected people. From there, noroviruses are transferred to food, water, or surfaces by the hands of infected people who have not washed adequately after using the bathroom.

People become infected with norovirus by:

- Eating food or drinking liquids contaminated by an infected person.
- Eating uncooked shellfish that has been harvested from contaminated waters.
- Touching contaminated surfaces or objects and then touching their mouth or eating without washing their hands first.

What should I do if I have symptoms?

- Drink plenty of fluids so you don't become dehydrated.
- Wash your hands often and do not prepare food for others.
- Contact your health care provider (but remember that antibiotics don't treat viruses).

How can I prevent norovirus infections?

- 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.
- Steam oysters before eating them.
- Avoid preparing food for others while you have symptoms and for at least 3 days after you recover.

To report a suspected foodborne illness, call the Minnesota Department of Health Foodborne Illness Hotline at 1-877-FOOD-ILL (or 651-201-5655 from the Twin Cities).



Infectious Disease Epidemiology, Prevention and Control
651-201-5414 - TDD/TTY 651-201-5655 - www.health.state.mn.us


If you require this document in another format, such as large print, please call 651-201-5414.

Mandatory November Meeting Reminder

Each year every licensed food establishment in Brown, Nicollet, Cottonwood or Watonwan County is required to send at least one owner or manager to one of the following Licensing Meetings. Please review the following schedule of meeting times and places and **make plans now to attend one of these meetings.**

You will be receiving your Food/Beverage License Application for 2020 at these meetings.

You only need to attend one meeting.



Tuesday, November 19, 2019 **8:30am - 10:00am**

New Ulm Community Center

600 N. German Street - New Ulm, Minnesota

Tuesday, November 19, 2019 **1:30pm - 3:00pm**

Nicollet County Health and Human Services Building

Lower Level - Minnesota River Room

622 S. Front Street - St. Peter, Minnesota

Wednesday, November 20, 2019 **9:00am -10:30am**

Windom Community Center - Room 105

1750 Cottonwood Lake Drive - Windom, Minnesota

Wednesday, November 20, 2019 **1:30pm - 3:00pm**

Watonwan County Human Services Building - Community Room

715 2nd Avenue S. - St. James, Minnesota

NOTE:

Schools and those establishments licensed as Limited Food Establishments or Service Kitchens are not required to attend, but are welcome if they would like to participate.

Contact Leah at our office at 507-934-7089 if you have any questions.

Brown-Nicollet Environmental Health
622 South Front Street
St. Peter, MN 56082



URGENT INFORMATION

CFPM Class Registration Forms

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