

Memo's Mexican Food Restaurant

Foodborne illness outbreak investigation summary

POSTED SEPTEMBER 14, 2016

Public Health is investigating a cluster of two diarrheal infections caused by Shiga-toxin producing *E. coli* (also called STEC) associated with Memo's Mexican Food in the University District. The King County resident ate there on both 8/18 and 8/24 while the other Washington resident (non-King County) ate there on 8/24. Public Health received the first report of illness on 8/31/16. Both persons have recovered.

Laboratory testing (molecular fingerprinting) has determined that both persons have the same strain of STEC bacteria, a strain that has not been seen before in King County. While all illnesses were caused by *E. coli* O157, **the genetic fingerprint for the strain from this cluster is different from the one that recently affected several patrons of the Matador restaurant in Ballard and these clusters do not appear to be related to each other.** Our Environmental Health team performed a field investigation of the restaurant on 9/12/16 and identified factors that may have contributed to this foodborne illness outbreak, including improper cooling, cold holding, reheating of potentially hazardous food and the potential for cross contamination. Because the violations were corrected while the inspectors were on site and there was not a concern for ongoing risk of foodborne illness to the public, the restaurant was not closed. Inspectors will return to the restaurant within 14 days to ensure continued compliance with the corrective measures that were put in place. The restaurant is working cooperatively with Public Health.

Persons who have eaten at Memo's and developed diarrhea within 10 days and anyone who develops bloody diarrhea should consult with their healthcare provider to determine if testing is necessary.

About STEC

E. coli bacteria normally live in the intestines of humans and animals. Many strains of *E. coli* bacteria exist, and most of them are harmless or beneficial to human health. STEC are strains of *E. coli* that produce Shiga toxin (such as *E. coli* O157:H7) and can cause serious illness in people.

Infection with STEC can occur through consumption of undercooked ground beef and other beef products; unpasteurized (raw) milk, cheese, and juice; contaminated raw fruits, vegetables, sprouts and herbs; water contaminated with animal feces, or by direct contact with farm animals or their environment. Ready-to-eat foods can also be contaminated with STEC through contact with raw beef or raw beef juices in the kitchen.

Symptoms of STEC include diarrhea (which often becomes bloody) and stomach cramps, with mild or no fever. Illness typically lasts several days and people can spread infection to others even after symptoms resolve.

To prevent STEC infection:

- Avoid eating high-risk foods, especially undercooked ground beef and other beef products, unpasteurized (raw) milk or juice or cheese, and raw sprouts.
- Use a food thermometer to make sure that ground beef has reached a safe internal temperature of 160° F.
- Wash hands before preparing food, after diapering infants, and after contact with cows, sheep, or goats, their food or treats, or their living environment.
- Thoroughly wash fresh produce before eating.