

Taking Action to Build Food-Safe Schools

Action Sheet

Responding to a Foodborne Illness Outbreak

A foodborne illness outbreak occurs when two or more people get the same illness from eating contaminated food from a common source. While foodborne illness outbreaks are relatively uncommon in schools, they do occur. Even one case of foodborne illness can be devastating. Outbreaks can threaten children's lives. Parents can panic. Districts can be held financially liable.

Protecting the safety and welfare of students and school staff are priorities when a foodborne illness outbreak occurs at a school. An investigation of an outbreak goes through many steps. Each outbreak will have unique characteristics that present a variety of issues for investigators; therefore, it is important to be prepared to respond to different types of investigations. Due to the challenges associated with an investigation, it may take investigators days, weeks, or months to identify the source of contamination that caused illness. You can help decrease this investigation time, and possibly prevent new illnesses from occurring, by preparing your school nutrition team for an outbreak investigation, and helping them understand response expectations.

Food-Safe Schools Action Steps and Resources

1. Work with your State or local health department to determine what records, documents, and information the school nutrition team will need to provide during an outbreak investigation.
2. Develop procedures for employees to maintain complete records, documents, and information—and be able to retrieve them quickly.
 - *Serving it Safe*, offered through NFSMI, provides school nutrition personnel at all levels with information for managing a safe and sanitary school foodservice operation. *Serving it Safe* includes guidance on preventing and responding to foodborne illness. www.nfsmi.org/ResourceOverview.aspx?ID=327 ■

Norovirus is a very contagious virus that causes sudden stomach illness. Most people, however, get better without treatment. Norovirus outbreaks have a dramatic impact on school attendance and the health of students and school staff. From 2000 to 2004, data showed that 67 percent of illnesses associated with confirmed foodborne illness outbreaks in school settings were attributed to norovirus. Contamination of foods with norovirus generally occurs when infected persons handle food. More information on the occurrence of norovirus in schools can be found in the *Journal of Environmental Health* publication *Analyses of eFORS (Electronic Foodborne Outbreak Reporting System) Surveillance Data (2000-2004) in School Settings*.

www.fns.usda.gov/sites/default/files/Food_Safety_EFORS_JEH_2010.pdf