

IDPH investigation continues as foodborne illnesses increase

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SPRINGFIELD – The Illinois Department of Public Health (IDPH) continues to work with local, state, and federal public health officials to investigate an increase in the number of Cyclospora illnesses in counties all across Illinois. Since mid-May, IDPH has received confirmation of 243 cases of cyclosporiasis, an intestinal illness caused by the microscopic Cyclospora parasite.

Of those, 92 reported eating salads produced for McDonald’s restaurants in the days before becoming ill. A new outbreak of cyclosporiasis linked to a private event at Evanston Golf Club in Skokie, Illinois, was identified this week. Not all sources of illness have been identified.

“Our investigation includes interviewing people who have become ill to learn what they ate, where they ate it, when, and if there are any commonalities,” said IDPH Director

Nirav D. Shah, M.D., J.D. “Additionally, we’re tracing any implicated foods to identify the manufacturer, producer, supplier, distributor, and all other points of contact to identify a source. If you feel like you may have been exposed to a foodborne illness and have symptoms, contact a health care provider.”

People can become infected by consuming food or water contaminated with feces (stool) that contains the parasite. Cyclospora is not spread directly from one person to another.

Symptoms begin about a week to up to two weeks after exposure, although some people who are infected may not have any.

Symptoms may include the following:

Frequent bouts of watery diarrhea (the most common symptom)

Loss of appetite and weight

Cramping, bloating, and/or increased gas

Nausea (vomiting is less common)

Fatigue

Low-grade fever

Cyclospora infection can be treated with specific antibiotics. If not treated, the illness may last for a few days to a month or longer.

Previous cyclosporiasis cases have been linked to various types of imported fresh produce including raspberries, basil, snow peas, and lettuce. Illinois case counts can be found on the IDPH website, and more information about outbreaks can be found on the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention website.