

HCC students and staff among those affected by salmonella illness

- By Marcus Clem Atchison Globe
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Students and staff of a northeast Kansas community college are among dozens who have been sickened with salmonella, with at least four hospitalized at Mosaic Life Care.

On Monday, David Reist, president of Highland Community College in Highland, said he joined several other staff members from the institution along with some faculty and students on Aug. 7 for an “Indian taco” dinner night at Highland United Methodist Presbyterian Church, 101 S. Avenue St in Highland. Reist said he is in good health, but the illness harmed up to 10 staff members and 2 students.

“It’s a small town,” Reist said. “Churches and all these kinds of people, all over the country, have these kinds of things. It just happened. I don’t think ... It never happened before, it probably will never happen here again. It’s been an inconvenience. It really hasn’t stopped our operations in any way, shape or form. We’ve had a few people out on sick leave.”

The Highland group participated in a dinner party of about 200 people at the church, according to the Doniphan County Health Department, at least 50 of whom have fallen ill with confirmed salmonella related illnesses.

“I have been the administrator here since 1984, and this is the first time we’ve had anything of this magnitude,” said Sheryl Pierce, the department’s administrator, in a phone interview. “There may be more (people sick). I’m about to make phone calls to all the (area) hospitals. We are completely slammed here.”

The four who remain hospitalized, according to the health department, are in stable condition and expected to make a full recovery. Reist said he didn’t know how many people

exactly have sought urgent medical care, but said he believes most of them obtained outpatient treatment such as IV fluids and antibiotics.

As the illness is linked to a single dining event and involves bacteria which must be consumed to cause illness, there is no risk

Pierce said everyone who ate the tacos at the dinner is encouraged to take a survey managed by the state Department of Health and the Environment, available at www.tinyurl.com/Doniphan. She said staff at KDHE and her department have been impressed by the response; ordinarily, usable data is hard to gather in a timely manner. As of Monday afternoon, more than 70 diners had taken the survey.

Mary Ellen Neidling, the church's financial secretary, said her husband, Harvey, became sick from the incident, along with her son-in-law. Authorities have declined to identify what food item might have given rise to the outbreak, but Neidling said the dinner had leftover stocks of shredded lettuce from an area wholesaler.

"We were just devastated by the whole thing, because we've served these dinners for years and years and years," she said. "This the first time anything serious like this has happened. And, we're very sorry for it, but it's one of those deals ... Everyone seems to be getting better, we hope."

The lettuce has been taken for examination, and investigators have told her they believe it is likely the culprit, she said. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention in Atlanta put out advisories on various types of lettuce earlier this year with regard to possible salmonella and E. coli bacterial infection.

According to Pierce, there is a two-week window of danger, sickness and recovery stemming from Aug. 7. Most people who are going to get sick have become sick, she said, and will recover by no later than next week. Some may still fall ill. The illness can last from a few days to a week, she said.

Anyone with information in the incident may contact the Doniphan County Health Department at *785-985-3591*.

SOURCE: http://www.atchisonglobenow.com/news/local_news/hcc-students-and-staff-among-those-affected-by-salmonella-illness/article_4c0c6940-3196-5fdf-80a3-544cf4e2d4df.html