

Hepatitis A associated with Señor Moose restaurant in Seattle

AT-A-GLANCE

- **Cases:** 3
- **Hospitalizations:** 1
- **Deaths:** 0
- **Status:** Investigation is ongoing
- **Locations:** Señor Moose, 5242 Leary Ave NW, Seattle, WA 98107
- **Meal dates:** February 24 and February 26
- **Current food safety rating:** [GOOD](#)

Highlights

Posted April 21, 2020

Summary

Public Health is investigating an outbreak of hepatitis A with jaundice (yellowing of the eyes and skin), abdominal pain, vomiting, diarrhea, and fever associated with Señor Moose restaurant in Seattle.

Illnesses

Since April 15, 2020, Public Health has learned of 3 people from 3 separate meal parties becoming ill with jaundice, abdominal pain, nausea, vomiting, fever and fatigue after consuming food from Señor Moose restaurant between February 24 and February 26, 2020. There is no indication that any current employees of the restaurant have had illnesses consistent with hepatitis A. Public Health is also contacting former employees to find out if any of them had been ill.

This outbreak is occurring while there is an [ongoing local outbreak of hepatitis A among persons experiencing homelessness](#). In July 2019, Washington state declared a statewide hepatitis A outbreak among people living homeless or who use drugs. More recently, the Ballard area, where Señor Moose is located, has had a cluster of hepatitis A cases among people experiencing homelessness; none of the three cases described above reported any connection to persons experiencing homelessness or who use drugs.

Genetic testing of the 3 cases associated with Señor Moose are pending at Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) to see if they match the local outbreak strains.

Public Health actions

Due to the ongoing response to COVID-19 and the current recommendations for social distancing, initial outreach to the restaurant was conducted over the phone to minimize risk of exposure. Environmental Health investigators held a teleconference with restaurant management on April 17, 2020. Investigators reviewed food handling practices, illness policies, employee schedules, employee health, and facility cleaning, sanitizing, and disinfection procedures with the restaurant management to identify possible risk factors for the spread of hepatitis A. The restaurant was closed for cleaning and disinfection on April 17, 2020 at 1:30 p.m.

Investigators interviewed all current employees about health history, job duties, and food handling practices. We will continue to interview all former employees who may have worked around the time the ill customers had their meals.

An Environmental Health investigator visited the restaurant on April 19, 2020 to review food handling practices at the establishment and to verify proper cleaning and disinfection was completed and all ready-to-eat foods were discarded.

The investigator reviewed the requirement with management that if staff become ill with hepatitis A, they are not allowed to work until it has been at least 7 days since jaundice onset AND they are symptom-free for at least 24 hours, indicating that they are no longer contagious. The investigator provided education about preventing the spread of hepatitis A — including proper handwashing, preventing bare hand contact with ready-to-eat foods, and reinforced illness policies, facility cleaning, sanitizing, and disinfection, and vaccination.

Prior to reopening for business on April 20, 2020, the business was required to establish and review employee illness policy with all employees and ensure all employees received food safety training before they begin their shift.

Public Health continues to do surveillance for additional cases associated with the restaurant by reviewing new and previously reported hepatitis A cases and foodborne illness complaints.

Public Health is working with the restaurant to provide hepatitis A vaccine to employees.

Laboratory testing

Three people who got sick tested positive for hepatitis A and had elevated (abnormal) liver enzyme testing consistent with acute hepatitis. Patient specimens were sent to CDC for genotyping.