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Portland visitor says hotel's hollandaise made him sick

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By **Lynne Terry, The Oregonian**

By

Bill Stanley was in Portland for a nationwide meeting of county commissioners last July when he suddenly got violently ill several hours after breakfast.

He was supposed to attend high-profile meetings that afternoon. Instead, medics rushed him to Legacy Emanuel Medical Center with uncontrollable diarrhea.

"I was hot and cold," he said. "I was gagging with the dry heaves. Then I started losing everything. It hurt, and it was embarrassing."

Now, Stanley is suing the company he considers responsible for his illness.



Bill Stanley

According to a state outbreak investigation, the **83-year-old six-term commissioner from North Carolina** was one of seven people sickened after breakfast that morning at Crowne Plaza Hotel in Northeast Portland. All of them ate eggs benedict. An eighth person, who ordered eggs benedict but had the hollandaise sauce on the side and didn't consume it, felt fine.

No one else got sick, pointing to the hollandaise sauce as the culprit.

Oregon health officials couldn't test it for pathogens, however. The hotel threw it away after breakfast service.

But lab tests confirmed that Stanley -- and another person hospitalized in the outbreak -- were sickened by a strain of *Staphylococcus aureus*, a bacterium commonly found on the skin and in the noses of healthy people. Certain strains produce toxins that can spark quick and acute gastrointestinal symptoms.

The same strain was found in a nasal swab of one of the food workers at Crowne Plaza.

The other five restaurant customers who became ill were not tested.

Dr. Mathieu Tourdjman, lead Oregon epidemiologist investigating the outbreak, said the sauce became toxic

because it was not kept hot enough.

Unlike many other pathogens, the toxins produced by Staph cannot be killed by cooking. The only way to prevent foodborne Staph infections is by thorough hand washing and proper cooking. Food safety advocates recommend keeping cooked food warm at 140 degrees Fahrenheit or more.

The temperature of the hollandaise sauce was not monitored by kitchen staff at Crowne Plaza, Tourdjman found.

But generally, Multnomah County health inspectors found the kitchen well organized and clean.

The outbreak shocked the hotel, according to general manager Ziggy Lopuszynski.

"It was devastating for the staff to think they made someone sick, and it was devastating for the people," Lopuszynski said. "We've always maintained good health practices, and it's unfortunate that that happened."

Lopuszynski said the hotel has taken the hollandaise sauce off the menu.

Hollander Investments Inc., a Bellingham, Wash., company that owns the hotel, settled complaints by two people in the outbreak, according to Drew Falkenstein, a food safety attorney in Seattle. Negotiations on the Stanley case deadlocked, prompting Falkenstein to file a lawsuit earlier this month in Multnomah County Circuit Court.

"The offer they made wouldn't pay for the hospital bill," Stanley said. "That doesn't sound right to me."

Since the morning Stanley became ill, he has racked up nearly \$14,000 in medical expenses, according to the lawsuit. He is seeking to recover those expenses plus at least \$26,000 in noneconomic damages.

Although Stanley's health has improved, he is irked that the case has not been settled.

Stanley said the noneconomic damages were important to him.

"I'm angry over the length of time to settle the thing," Stanley said. "I'm not after a whole lot of money. But I want some (compensation for) pain and suffering."

-- **Lynne Terry**

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