



PUBLIC HEALTH DEPARTMENT

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A Cluster of Gastrointestinal Illnesses Has Been Identified In Belgium

The Ozaukee Health Department, with assistance from health officials at the State Division of Public Health, is investigating a cluster of gastrointestinal illnesses among children in Belgium, WI. The investigation has identified two laboratory-confirmed cases of E coli O157:H7 infection in siblings. One had onset in December and one had onset in January. A 3rd case was identified in a neighbor who had onset in December and tested negative for E. coli infection, but is considered a probable case based on clinical symptoms. Two of the 3 patients were hospitalized, and one remains hospitalized.

E coli O157:H7 is a reportable condition in Wisconsin and cases are routinely interviewed to determine potential sources of infection. Interviews conducted with family members for all 3 cases were unable to identify a common food item or other definite source of infection. The source has not been absolutely determined but a possible explanation includes close contact or a common environmental source, such as contaminated snow or ice. In addition the children had close personal contact with each other which could lead to transmission between the children.

The Health Department is also investigating a case of laboratory-confirmed cryptosporidiosis in a child from the same neighborhood. At this time there is no evidence that this infection is related to the three E. coli cases, however the investigation is ongoing. Both cryptosporidium and E. coli are found on farms and in animal manure.

As a precaution, the Village of Belgium tested the water supply over the weekend and determined that the water is safe. In addition, the health department is working closely with the DNR and the Ozaukee County Department of Land and Water to assist in evaluating environmental concerns.

E. coli O157:H7 infection transmits readily from person-to-person, particularly among children. Careful attention to hand-washing and hygiene is an important means of preventing infection. Hand-hygiene is particularly important after exposure to farms, farm animals, animal manure, geese and deer droppings which often contain pathogenic organisms including E. coli O157:H7 and cryptosporidium.