

E. coli O157:H7 Outbreak Associated with a Canada Day Picnic

Toronto Public Health is currently investigating an E. coli O157:H7 outbreak associated with a picnic at Morningside Park in Scarborough for a Sri Lankan community group held on July 1st 2007. Approximately 300 to 400 persons attended the event.

There are currently 13 suspect cases, including 6 persons who are hospitalized. The most likely mode of transmission is considered to be food-borne. There is evidence that secondary transmission may be occurring in households as well.

Toronto Public Health is asking clinicians to be vigilant in the detection and appropriate testing of G.I. illness. **Any suspect E. coli O157:H7 cases should be asked about attendance at this picnic and reported to Toronto Public Health.**

The signs and symptoms of E. coli O157:H7 include: diarrhea, bloody diarrhea, abdominal pain, nausea, or vomiting. Complications include dehydration and hemolytic-uremia syndrome (HUS), which presents with hemolytic anemia, thrombocytopenia and acute renal dysfunction.

The incubation period is typically 3-4 days (range 2 to 10 days). E. coli O157:H7 is highly contagious and spread by consuming contaminated food, or direct person-to-person transmission.

Laboratory diagnosis of E. coli O157:H7 includes stool testing for bacterial culture, which should be submitted in the enteric transport media (pink liquid). Blood culture for verocytotoxin producing E. coli can also confirm the diagnosis and can be performed if indicated. All samples potentially related to this outbreak should be sent to the Central Public Health Laboratory for testing.

Suspect cases should avoid preparing or handling food that will be eaten by others. Frequent hand washing should be emphasized to help reduce the risk of transmission.

In Toronto, 34 verotoxin producing E. coli cases were reported in 2005, and 11 (32%) of them were under 10 years of age.

Verotoxin-producing E. coli infections are reportable communicable diseases. Please report all suspect and confirmed cases immediately to Toronto Public Health at 416-392-7411 (or 416-690-2142 after hours).

Web-site: <http://www.toronto.ca/health/cdc/surveillance>