Foodborne viruses

Noroviruses are the leading cause of foodborne illness.

• Norovirus (the “stomach flu”) causes nausea, vomiting, & diarrhea. There are over 5 million foodborne cases per year in the U.S. alone. Hepatitis A illness starts with flu-like symptoms and then progresses to jaundice (yellowing of the skin & eyes) and sometimes other complications.

• For both viruses, it is possible to be infected and not show symptoms; the sick person is also infectious for days to weeks before, during, and after illness, so keeping your hands clean is especially important. This is also important if you are taking care of someone who is ill.

• Norovirus infection is miserable but usually lasts a short time. Sometimes it is necessary to see a doctor because of dehydration. Hepatitis A infection is much more severe.

Outbreak Snapshots

Hepatitis A

In 2013, over 100 people in the Western U.S. became ill with hepatitis A infections after eating contaminated frozen berries (pomegranate seeds are likely the vehicle of contamination).

In early 2013, dozens were sickened in Europe over several months from frozen berries served in smoothies.

A 2012 outbreak of hepatitis A in Canada was also linked to a frozen mixed berry blend.

Norovirus

In 2012, over 11,000 children and teens in Germany were sickened by norovirus from contaminated frozen strawberries distributed to schools.

In a 2009 norovirus outbreak in Europe caused by raspberries, over half of those affected were children younger than 7 years of age.

In 2005, contaminated raspberries sickened more than 1000 people in Denmark, including people in hospitals and nursing homes.