3 Dead, 7 Hospitalized in Pennsylvania Hepatitis A Outbreak

The source of the hepatitis A outbreak hasn't been confirmed, but officials are looking into at least 12 other related cases. [VIDEO]

January 20, 2022 By Trent Straube

A third person has died in a hepatitis A outbreak in Montgomery County, Pennsylvania, reports 6abc.com (you can watch the segment below). Seven people are currently in the hospital, and at least 12 cases are under investigation. The viral outbreak has been linked to Gino's Ristorante & Pizzeria in West Norriton.

Hepatitis A virus attacks the liver and can be spread through contaminated food and water. In most cases, it is not fatal.

Although the eatery has been closed since January 7 while the investigation continues, health officials have not confirmed that Gino's is the source of the outbreak, and the restaurant's owners deny responsibility.

The restaurant's attorney released the following statement, reported January 7 by 6abc.com:

> There has been an unfounded rumor circulating that Gino's caused a Hepatitis A death. This is false. The Montgomery County and Pennsylvania Health Departments have inspected our restaurant and found no evidence of any airborne or transmittable disease; approved the cleanliness of our facility; approved our refrigeration and hot water temperatures and did not cite us or our suppliers for any violation in connection with their investigation. None of our staff has been ill; we have followed all COVID protocols; and none of our customers have contacted us about any food issues. We have been in business for over 50 years and in this location for almost 15 years. We pride ourselves on our outstanding reputation for excellent Italian food and we hope that you will not be influenced by false rumors. We ask our loyal customers to please give us the names of the persons spreading this maliciousness so that we can take the appropriate legal action to stop this madness. We offer our heartfelt condolences to the family of the departed. We cannot and will not take responsibility for something we did not cause.

Located in the southeast Pennsylvania, Montgomery County is adjacent to Philadelphia and is the

third most populous county in the state.

Last year, a hepatitis A outbreak at three Famous Anthony's locations in Virginia was responsible for at least three deaths and 21 hospitalizations. That outbreak spanned several months. And in November, customers at a New Jersey Starbucks were urged to get vaccinated against hep A after an employee tested positive for the virus.

Hepatitis refers to inflammation of the liver. It can be caused by a number of factors, ranging from viruses and autoimmune diseases to accumulated fat and excess alcohol. Hepatitis A is an acute form of hepatitis, meaning it is not chronic or long term (unlike hepatitis B and C). Once you've had hep A, you can't contract it again. However, you can still contract hep B and C.

The best way to prevent hep A is to get vaccinated. The shot is safe and effective, and the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention recommends it to all 1-year-old children and populations at higher risk, such as people traveling to countries with higher hep A rates (including Central America and South America), men who have sex with men and people with chronic liver disease. For more details, see "How Can Hepatitis A Be Prevented?"

Not everyone with hep A will develop symptoms. But according to the Hep Basics, symptoms of hepatitis A (and acute hepatitis in general) include:

- Yellowing of the skin, whites of the eyes and under the fingernails (jaundice)
- Feeling tired and rundown (fatigue)
- Pain in the upper-right abdomen
- Loss of appetite
- Weight loss
- Fever
- Nausea
- Diarrhea
- Vomiting
- Dark urine and/or pale stool
- Joint pain.

Vaccines are also available for hepatitis B. Currently, there isn't one for hep C, the other common type of hepatitis in the United States. To learn more about hepatitis and other liver diseases, see Hep's Introduction to Hepatitis.

Want to track similar outbreaks in your area? Click here for details about hepatitis A outbreaks

across America in the past 12 months, organized by state and via a searchable map.

And for a roundup of hep A articles, click #Hepatitis A, where you'll find headlines such as "Why Can't Pharmacists in New York State Give Hepatitis Vaccinations? [VIDEO]" and "Five Goals of the New National Plan to End Viral Hepatitis."

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