

Disease Detectives – Sample Problem From CDC

At least 70 people attending a national conference in a city in Texas became ill with what appeared to be food poisoning. Three hospitals in the area treated and released 48 attendees who complained of nausea and vomiting; others with similar symptoms were hospitalized overnight. A health official noted that all of the patients had eaten brunch or lunch at the same hotel.

The hotel's lunch menu included roast chicken, roast beef, and a vegetable pasta dish. Because some of the people who became ill were vegetarian, there was particular interest in determining whether the pasta dish might be contaminated. At the time of the report, health officials were still looking for the source of the outbreak. The hotel was cooperating in the investigation and had voluntarily halted food service for the time being.

Questions

1. Explain why you might consider this problem important enough to investigate. Give at least three reasons for investigating.
2. Briefly describe the initial steps that you would take in investigating this problem. Indicate the type of data needed to accomplish each step and give examples of sources of such data in a community.
3. Develop and specify probable hypotheses to explain the cause, source, and spread of the outbreak.
4. Describe approaches to testing alternative hypotheses.
5. Develop suitable recommendations and interventions for controlling the problem.