As foodborne illness peaks during the summer months, we thought it would be timely to provide some reminders regarding the identification, reporting, and investigation of foodborne illness outbreaks.

Some key points to keep in mind regarding the identification and reporting of foodborne illness outbreaks:

- As per 105 CMR 300.160 and 590.017, any suspected cluster or outbreak of foodborne illness is immediately reportable by the local board of health to the Massachusetts Department of Public Health (MDPH) Food Protection Program or Epidemiology Program. Information can be reported using fax or via the creation of a Foodborne Illness Complaint in MAVEN, but should always be accompanied by a phone call to prevent any delays in notification.
- Individuals that are part of a cluster or outbreak do not need to have sought medical attention or have received a clinical diagnosis for an investigation to be initiated.

A cluster or outbreak is defined as an increase in the usual frequency of illness in a given area or among a specified population over a particular period of time. A suspected cluster or outbreak could include:

- An increase in the number of reported salmonellosis cases in your jurisdiction in a given month;
- A resident reporting two or more people ill with undiagnosed gastrointestinal illness after attending a party or event;
- More than one case of campylobacteriosis reporting dining at the same restaurant during their incubation period; or
- An emergency department reporting an increase in the number of college students being seen with diarrhea and vomiting over the weekend.

The MDPH Working Group on Foodborne Illness Control (WGFIC), collaboration between the Epidemiology Program, Food Protection Program, and Public Health Laboratories, is available to assist local health departments with cluster and outbreak investigations. This includes assisting with case interviews, conducting case finding, the development and deployment of electronic or paper surveys, statistical analysis of outbreak data, stool testing of patrons and/or foodhandlers, and food testing, when applicable.

An epidemiologist is available 24/7 to receive reports of any suspected outbreaks or clusters: (617) 983-6800

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Please share this ePostcard with others in your Health Department who are not on MAVEN.

If you have questions about MAVEN, please email isishelp@state.ma.us or contact the MAVEN help desk at 617-983-6801. If you have questions about foodborne disease investigation, please contact the Epidemiology Program at 617-983-6800 or Food Protection Program at 617-983-6712.