



Salmonella outbreak worst seen

Medical officer says RBG food poisoning traced to roast beef and cross-contamination with pork

BY MELISSA MEWDELL

Halton's medical officer of health says the Mother's Day food poisoning at the Royal Botanical Gardens is the worst he's seen.

"I've been here for 16 years and this is the first outbreak (of salmonella food poisoning) of this magnitude," said Dr. Bob Nosal. "Salmonella infections are quite common. What is uncommon is the size of this outbreak."

The Halton Region Health

Department's investigation confirmed yesterday that 155 out of the 288 people who ate the Mother's Day brunch became ill. Eight of those who got sick needed to be hospitalized due to dehydration caused by excessive diarrhea and vomiting.

The investigation, which is almost complete, found that salmonella bacteria present in roast beef multiplied. From there, other roasts as well as pork and ham were contaminated. Three different strains of

salmonella were present in stool and blood samples collected from people who ate the buffet, but the health department is still waiting on lab results to finalize which strains.

"Although there are certain products more likely to have salmonella, like chicken and eggs, it can occur in (beef)," Nosal said.

He said that about 20 per cent of raw chicken carries salmonella while 5 per cent of raw beef is contaminated. Food must be kept below 4 C or above 70 C

to remain safe to eat.

Nosal said a combination of the food being kept at an improper temperature as well as cross contamination are responsible for the outbreak.

He added that based on statistics from the investigation, those who ate the roast beef were 2.5 times more likely to get sick than those who didn't.

Kate Greenland, owner of RBG caterer Compton & Greenland Fine Foods Catering of Hamilton, was shocked to hear the bacteria came from the roast

beef. However, she wouldn't comment further on the findings of the investigation.

"This is a very serious matter," she said. "As you know, the investigation is not complete."

The RBG fired Compton & Greenland on May 31 by locking Greenland and her staff out, she said. The RBG has since employed Pepperwood Catering to provide food services until the RBG completes a request for proposal to select a new catering company.

Acting CEO Stephen Oliver

could not be reached for comment.

Greenland said in an interview yesterday that she intends to continue her business.

The RBG is suing Compton & Greenland for \$1.1 million (\$500,000 from the company for breach of contract and \$500,000 from Greenland for negligence). The RBG is also being sued by at least one patron who got sick.

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