



THE INVESTIGATIVE PROCESS

What happens when a complaint is received?



STEP ONE

The Department investigates whenever there are 2 or more ill individuals who do not live in the same house and have a common exposure.



STEP TWO

When sufficient data is received to confirm that an outbreak is occurring, the Director of Nursing declares the outbreak and the Public Health Administrator activates the illness outbreak investigation team.

The illness outbreak investigation team includes staff from the Health Administration, Public Health Nursing (Communicable Disease and Epidemiology Programs), and Environmental Health. In the event that an illness outbreak is related to animal exposure, Veterinary Public Health staff would also participate.



STEP THREE

Every illness outbreak investigation consists of communicable disease, epidemiological, and environmental health investigations, which are conducted concurrently.



STEP FOUR

The Illness Outbreak Investigation Team meets routinely throughout the investigation to share data and determine the next steps in the investigation process.

The role of the Public Health Administrator is to oversee the investigative process, approve staff recommendations for remediation or corrective actions; direct all communications (general public, food establishments, Board of Health, County Board, etc.), and approve the release of the final report.

The role of the Communicable Disease section is to conduct interviews of ill and well individuals with exposure to the outbreak pathogen, facilitate collection of specimens for pathogen identification and treatment (if needed), and provide education to cases and contacts to prevent further spread of the infectious pathogen.

The role of Environmental Health is to conduct physical and procedural evaluations and inspections of relevant operations and collect environmental samples for analysis (food, water, swabs, etc.)

The role of the Epidemiology team is to perform an analysis of all data collected throughout the investigation to determine the etiology (cause) of the outbreak.



STEP FIVE

The investigation team collects and examines the connections that develop from the data collected from the Communicable Disease, Environmental Health, Epidemiological, and laboratory findings. From this starting point, the team gathers the contributing factors to the illness, and the data is evaluated and updated throughout the investigation as more information becomes available. A list of recommendations and control measures are identified to prevent future illness.



STEP SIX

Upon conclusion of the investigation, a final report is completed, released to the public, and posted on the Department's website.