

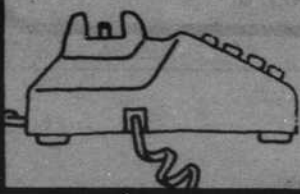
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Poisonings soar to epidemic level

THE DALLES — The toll of people reporting food poisoning symptoms rose to 192 Thursday in what public health officials said could be one of the largest salmonella outbreaks in recent Oregon history.

Nearly 2 percent of The Dalles' population was stricken by the illness. Randy Skov, head of admissions at Mid-Columbia Medical Center, said 28 people remained hospitalized Thursday, five of whom were admitted Wednesday night. Another 12 people have been released from the hospital.

Tests were being conducted on the patients to determine whether salmonella bacteria caused the vomiting, diarrhea and cramps.

Carla Chamberlain, administrator of the Wasco County Health Department, said 40 of the cases have been confirmed as salmonella.

Arlo's Restaurant and Shakey's Pizza Parlor — two of three restaurants linked to the outbreak — closed Thursday.

The Portage Inn also has been linked to the illness, but remained open, Chamberlain said. Two other restaurants under investigation remained open, but health officials declined to name them.

Results of tests on food from the restaurants were not expected before Friday, said Dennis Illingsworth, county sanitation engineer.

"It appears a common denominator may be the salad bars in these restaurants," he said. "As a precautionary measure, all restaurants in the area are advised to stop using salad bars for the present."

Dr. Bruce Carlson, Wasco County health officer, said the victims had eaten at salad bars, "but not necessarily the same things." Illingsworth said not all of the victims had eaten at salad bars, however.

Chamberlain said that unlike many restaurants, each of the three to which the illness was linked made its own salads daily and did not buy them from a restaurant service.

One investigator from the Federal Center for Disease Control in Atlanta arrived Thursday and another was expected to arrive by Friday to help investigate the outbreak that began Sept. 13.

Investigators interviewed food handlers, as well as those who became ill.

Kristine Gebbie, administrator of the Oregon Health Division, called the incident "one of the larger salmonella outbreaks the state has had recently."

Other cases of food poisoning have been reported in Hood River, Hermiston, Madras and Bend, she said. Five of the nine people who became ill in Hood River were hospitalized, and four people were hospitalized in Bend.

"All the cases that we know about are people who ate in The Dalles," she said. "It's not surprising, given that The Dalles is on a main highway. People stop there and eat and then travel on."

Idle steam valve hinders Trojan

RAINIER — The problem-plagued Trojan Nuclear Plant was shut down for the second time in a week after a steam relief valve failed to reclose, officials said Thursday.

The plant was shut down after the Wednesday night incident, which was classified as an "unusual event." It would not begin operating until at least Thursday night, said Bill Babcock, spokesman for Portland General Electric Co.

The plant had been scheduled to reach full power this weekend, but "this will undoubtedly set us back a little bit," he said.

Two inspectors from the U.S. Nuclear Regulatory Commission were at the plant Thursday as officials from PGE, which operates the plant, and the Oregon Department of Energy tried to determine what caused the problem.

Babcock said the incident began when a feed pump swayed, causing the valve to open about 11 p.m. Operators lowered the pressure in the steam system until the valve closed at 11:35 p.m.

"The valve did not close when it should have," said Sue Gagener, spokeswoman for the U.S. Nuclear Regulatory Commission in Walnut Creek, Calif. "It did lead to a low level on the steam generator and a reactor trip," in which the reactor went off-line.

Because the feed pump caused the valve to open, the incident "may be remotely related" to problems last week, he added. Operations were stopped at the plant Sept. 20 after three pumps failed to work during an automatic shutdown. During a test, the power level inadvertently was increased too rapidly, triggering a shutdown. But two water pumps and an electric generator designed to activate during such a shutdown failed.

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