



What we learned: 3 takeaways from Hamilton news conference about Rosa's Restaurant hepatitis A case

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HAMILTON — Though many customers of Rosa's Restaurant and Catering are concerned about a food service employee diagnosed with hepatitis A, the restaurant is now safe to visit and health officials are working to curb the spread of the infection.

UPDATE: Hamilton Mayor Kelly Yaede announced details on a hepatitis A vaccine clinic scheduled for Thursday.

Though the employee at Rosa's Restaurant and Catering, located at 3442 S. Broad St., has been hospitalized since Nov. 25, health officials have **recommended hepatitis A or immune globulin vaccines** to anyone who ate at the South Broad Street restaurant or ordered catering between Nov. 10 and Dec. 1.

Symptoms include mild fever, loss of appetite, nausea, fatigue, vomiting, diarrhea, abdominal pain and dark urine and yellowing of the skin. Anyone experiencing symptoms is asked to consult their doctor.

Health officials on Tuesday held a news conference, which was open to the public, to address concerns from Rosa's customers and provide an update on options for anyone at risk of infection.

"Of all the hepatitis (infections), hepatitis A would be the least significant. There's a very slight, remote, minuscule chance of it being fatal, which hardly ever occurs," township health officer Jeff Plunkett said. "He will recover from it. The symptoms are mostly (gastrointestinal), which would be the same as a stomach virus."

Here are the three main takeaways from the **presentation by Hamilton officials**.

Rosa's is open and the food is safe

Rosa's Restaurant and Catering is a mainstay in the township, providing takeout and eat-in lunches and dinners in addition to providing catering services for a host of popular banquet halls and event spaces.

Township officials visited the restaurant Monday night and said managers were completely cooperative with all requests.

Plunkett said all food that may have been handled or come into contact with the particular employee was thrown away and replaced.

In addition, all staff members at the South Broad Street restaurant were replaced with people from satellite

locations who hadn't come into contact with the employee.

People who worked with the exposed employee will not be allowed to return to work until after they're vaccinated, Plunkett said.

The restaurant was open for business on Tuesday, when an employee who did not give her name said that "everything was cleared."

While the restaurant itself is a popular spot, the catering business is used by a multitude of public and private entities throughout Hamilton.

The municipal government has awarded catering contracts to Rosa's at Sayen Gardens and Grafton House, two popular event spaces, and the business also caters for the Nottingham Ballroom, a banquet hall owned by the Nottingham Fire Company in Hamilton Square.

But in those cases, food was not prepared at the South Broad Street restaurant where the infected employee worked, Plunkett said.

The business also provides catering for township events, such as dinners at the senior center, on an event-by-event basis, business administrator John Ricci said. A number of township directors were at a recent event catered by Rosa's but that food was also prepared elsewhere, Ricci said.

The restaurant provides lunches to students at the St. Raphael-Holy Angels school just next door, but Plunkett said the staff changeover and food replacements on Monday were sufficient.

Plunkett said he was "completely confident" in the lunch served to the students, of whom 80 to 85 percent are already vaccinated against hepatitis A, earlier on Tuesday.

"Parents of the students at the school who are not vaccinated will be contacted by (the school's) public health nurse today," he said.

Contact your Thanksgiving dinner guests

Plunkett has recommended that anyone who ate food prepared at Rosa's since Nov. 10 should seek immunization.

With the Thanksgiving holiday less than a week past, many residents at the Tuesday morning news conference expressed concern for their dinner guests.

"Our recommendation is, if you held Thanksgiving dinner at your house and there was food from Rosa's, you should contact your guests and have them consult their primary care physicians," Plunkett said.

But immunizations, though they are helpful, are probably not necessary for anyone who had "second contact"

with the infection.

For example, if a Rosa's customer ate food prepared at the restaurant during the last month, they should seek immunization. However, people the customer has come in contact with likely won't need a vaccine, though they should also consult a physician.

Anyone who has received a hepatitis A vaccine in the past is probably protected, though Plunkett said an additional booster shot would be helpful.

Help is on the way

Though township health officer Jeff Plunkett on Monday night suggested vaccines for anyone at risk of infection, local supplies are low and there may be a shortage.

In response, the township will hold a clinic this week for anyone who needs the vaccine. The vaccinations will not be free but provided at cost to anyone who believes he or she is at risk, Plunkett said

Details are expected to be announced later Tuesday, he said.

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