Food safety in restaurants made headlines last year when E. Coli outbreaks linked to Chipotle Mexican Grill sickened 60 people in 14 states. All Chipotle restaurant locations closed until 3 p.m. Feb. 8, 2016, for an all-staff food safety meeting that was broadcast live. Preventing and controlling foodborne illness outbreaks is a collaborative effort between local and state health departments and federal agencies.
Addressing Foodborne Illness Outbreaks

States Affected by Chipotle’s E. Coli Outbreak

Food safety in restaurants made headlines last year when E. Coli outbreaks linked to Chipotle Mexican Grill sickened 80 people in 14 states. All Chipotle restaurant locations closed until 3 p.m. Feb. 8, 2016, for an all-staff food safety meeting that was broadcast live.

Foodborne Illness Investigations: Key Players

- **Local Health Departments**: Local health departments often take the initial reports from people who suspect they’ve contracted a foodborne illness at a restaurant. Most foodborne outbreaks remain local.

- **State Health Departments**: State health departments investigate outbreaks that spread across multiple cities or counties. Many state health departments have a hotline for people to report suspected cases of foodborne illness.

- **The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC)**: The CDC often investigates outbreaks affecting multiple states or involving an unusual illness or large groups of people. States communicate with one another and with CDC about outbreaks and investigations.

- **Food and Drug Administration (FDA)**: The CDC collaborates with the FDA or the FSIS during an outbreak investigation. FDA and FSIS find out why an outbreak occurred, and assess food safety measures in restaurants and food processing facilities.

Outbreak Experts

- Epidemiologists: Scientists who deal with the incidence, distribution, and control of disease in a population.
- Microbiologists: Scientists who study extremely small forms of life such as bacteria and viruses.
- Environmental health specialists, aka sanitarians: Specialists in sanitary science and public health.
- Regulatory compliance officers and inspectors: Officials who enforce food safety laws.

The Food Industry’s Role

- Selling Safety Standards

Food safety managers at food production, packaging and distribution companies work to prevent problems that may cause illness outbreaks. Some companies set their own food safety standards for themselves and their suppliers.

Outbreak Control and Prevention

Restaurants involved in foodborne illness outbreaks often take action to help stop the outbreak and prevent future outbreaks. They may close affected locations, disinfect their facilities, retrain or retraining employees, or change their food handling policies and practices.

SOURCE: Centers for Disease Control and Prevention

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