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NOROVIRUS LINKED TO RECENT REPORTS OF ILLNESS IN CATAWBA COUNTY

HICKORY, NC – Catawba County Public Health has received confirmation that norovirus is linked to illness reported by people who ate at Harbor Inn Seafood Restaurant in Conover. Norovirus, often called the “stomach bug,” food poisoning or viral gastroenteritis, is the most common cause of acute gastroenteritis in the United States.

In collaboration with the North Carolina Division of Public Health (NCDPH), Catawba County Public Health collected a limited number of stool samples from individuals reporting illness and sent them to the state laboratory on January 25. Lab analysis revealed the presence of norovirus.

“Catawba County Public Health is continuing to work closely with Harbor Inn to help prevent further illness,” said Doug Urland, health director, Catawba County Public Health. “Because norovirus is such a common illness, especially during this time of year, we encourage everyone to help prevent the spread of infection by washing their hands often and staying home when sick.”

According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), norovirus is a common, easily-transmissible, and highly contagious illness that can cause vomiting, diarrhea and stomach pain. Symptoms usually resolve themselves within one to two days, but the virus may be detectable in stool for a longer period of time.

No specific drug is used to treat norovirus. If illness occurs, drink fluids to prevent dehydration and seek medical attention if symptoms continue.

Catawba County Public Health began investigating after receiving the first report of illness on January 17. Since then, a total of 128 complaints have been documented to date. A majority of the complaints were from individuals who ate at the restaurant on January 13 or 14. The last date associated with causing illness is January 20. The onset of illness typically occurred within 12 to 24 hours after dining and lasted 24 to 36 hours.

Following the initial report of illness, Catawba County Public Health’s Environmental Health specialists conducted a thorough inspection of the restaurant and found no violations. They are monitoring the situation daily and are providing additional safe foodservice education to restaurant personnel, who have also been following recommended, extra-stringent sanitation guidelines.

As a result of the findings, Catawba County Public Health is taking additional steps to educate the community about norovirus and how to prevent the spread of infection. For more information from the CDC about norovirus, please visit www.cdc.gov.

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