TEXT: Timeline for Identifying and Reporting Cases in Foodborne Outbreaks

Ever wonder why the number of cases in a foodborne outbreak can increase for weeks, even after the contaminated food is off the market?

A series of events happen before public health officials can report that a case of illness is linked to an outbreak.

TEXT: Friday, January 01

You eat a contaminated food

IMAGE: *A family is seated around a dining table eating a meal; a knife and fork mark the date on a calendar.*

TEXT: After a few days, you start to feel sick with nausea or diarrhea

IMAGE: *Days are marked off on the calendar until January 03, where a sad face marks the date.*

TEXT: Monday, January 04

You go to a healthcare provider and give a sample

IMAGE: *A car arrives at a clinic; a stethoscope marks the date on the calendar.*

TEXT: Wednesday, January 06

Your sample arrives at a clinical laboratory for testing

IMAGE: *A truck leaves the clinic and arrives at a lab; a truck and test tubes mark the calendar.*

TEXT: Thursday, January 07

Tests are run on your sample

IMAGE: *Bacteria are shown on floating on a petri dish, with the day marked on the calendar.*

TEXT: Friday, January 08

The lab identifies the germ making you sick

IMAGE: *A clipboard is shown with a checklist and “E. coli” marked, with an icon marking the calendar.*

TEXT: Monday, January 11

The clinical laboratory sends a sample of your bacteria to a public health laboratory

Shipping can take up to a week

IMAGE: *A truck drives away from the lab, with the days traced on the calendar.*

TEXT: Wednesday, January 13

The public health laboratory receives the sample for more testing

IMAGE: *Bacteria as shown floating on a petri dish; a DNA strand marks the calendar.*

TEXT: January 15 – 20

The laboratory performs whole genome sequencing (WGS) analysis and other tests

IMAGE: *A DNA strand is observed by a magnifying glass; days are marked on the calendar as time passes.*

TEXT: Wednesday, January 20

WGS shows more details about the germ making you sick

IMAGE: *A checkmark appears next to the DNA strand and marks the calendar.*

TEXT: Friday, January 22

The public health laboratory sends WGS results to CDC

IMAGE: *A person is seated at a desk with a large computer monitor; a dotted line traces from a DNA strand to a document icon, a database icon, and the person’s computer.*

TEXT: Monday, January 25

TEXT: CDC determines if your illness is related to other recent illnesses

IMAGE: *A CDC laptop displays a bar graph forming over time.*

IMAGE: *The entire calendar timeline with icons is shown.*

TEXT: Total time: 3-4 weeks

Public health officials work to detect and solve outbreaks as quickly as they can.

**You can help solve outbreaks and save lives.**

If you think you have food poisoning, report it to your local or state health department. You can help us solve outbreaks and help protect others from getting sick.

<https://www.cdc.gov/foodsafety/outbreaks/investigating-outbreaks/report-illness/public.html>