

Quality Pork Processor Worker Illnesses

About a dozen workers at Quality Pork Processors in southern Minnesota have become ill. This illness is characterized by a combination of weakness and changes in sensation which progresses over time.

Q: What is unique about the neurological illnesses observed in these pork processor workers?

The workers developed unusual illnesses involving weakness and changes in sensation including pain. Additional testing by health care providers suggests an illness associated with inflammation of the nervous system.

Some of the workers have an illness that is consistent with a form of an uncommon disease called chronic inflammatory demyelinating polyneuropathy (CIDP). CIDP involves inflammation in multiple nerves which progresses over at least several months. CIDP can affect people of all ages. These workers do not have multiple sclerosis.

Given the rarity of this disorder, identification of a group of cases, and just in pork processor workers, is concerning.

Q: How did these workers get the illness?

This is actively under investigation by MDH.

Q: What is MDH doing to understand what is causing these illnesses?

MDH is investigating many types of possible exposures in the processing plant including toxins, infections, tissue from pigs, and others. MDH investigators are working with CDC and alerting colleagues in the rest of the country to determine if cases are being seen in workers in other pork processing plants around the United States.

Q: Did all of the workers at the processing plant have the same illness?

No, only 11 workers out of a work force larger than 1,100 employees at that plant have become ill.

Q: Are people outside of the plant at risk of getting ill?

CIDP and related neurological illnesses occur rarely throughout the world and individual cases are expected. This cluster of cases all work in the same plant and in the same area of the plant. No illnesses have been associated with working on the “cold” side of the plant where meat is processed. We are also looking at similar types of occupational settings to see if there are other cases.

Q: Is it safe to eat pork or pork products?

Yes, it is safe to eat pork and pork products. No cases have been linked to the consumption of pork or pork products.

Q: What is MDH recommending to protect the pork processing workers? Additional personal protective measures have been implemented in the plant following the advice from MDH.

Q: What should I do if I have symptoms?

If you have symptoms, you should go to a doctor. There are tests that your doctor can do and there may be medicine to make you feel better.

