



Protecting Our Economy

When an outbreak occurs, we focus first on the human impact – but disease outbreaks hurt our economy, too.

Norovirus Closes Seattle Office Building

In December 2015, more than 200 people were sickened at a catered event held in the Russell Investments Center Building in downtown Seattle. For two days, more than eight restaurants and cafes – as well as a catering operation – were closed for Public Health’s investigation and a deep cleaning process. Additionally, the entire 17th floor of the building was shut down for cleaning. This is just one example of the impact of foodborne illness to our economy, which has an estimated \$15.6 billion annual impact on our national economy each year according to the USDA.

E. coli Closes Daycare – Parents Miss Work

When two small children were hospitalized due to complications from a dangerous strain of *E. coli*, the Snohomish Health District had to make a tough call to close the Montessori school they attended to prevent the spread of this serious disease. Working closely with school staff, the Department of Early Learning, and the state’s Public Health Lab, more than 70 children and employees were tested in a matter of days. Health District staff also worked with the school to thoroughly sanitize the facility prior to re-opening. The school lost income during the closure and families were forced to miss work until their kids were cleared to return. Expanding outreach to child care owners and providers on developing and enforcing health policies is critical to preventing closures like this.

Water Contamination Causes Losses for Small Business

When a water main broke in the City of Pullman, a precautionary boil water order was issued to protect residents from possible water contamination. Businesses and residents were told to use bottled water or to boil water used for drinking, brushing teeth, preparing food, making ice, and washing dishes. While Pullman didn’t require area restaurants to close, many opted to shut down during the 3-day boil water order because both the expense and challenge of adhering to the boil water order were too much. One local restaurant owner estimated the unexpected three-day closure cost him about 10 percent of profits he would have made that month.

On Mercer Island in King County, a water-boil alert resulted in 62 licensed food establishments being closed twice over a two month period and a one day school closure. Schools were reopened only after they had been sanitized and students were provided bottled water. During the alert, the Island’s grocery store had to dispose of all food touched by tap water which included vegetables, meat, and fish.

For more information, please contact the Washington State Public Health Association at info@wspha.org.