

News Release



State of Wyoming
Department of Health
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Subject: Reports of Gastrointestinal Illness Prompt Investigation

CHEYENNE - Several reports of gastrointestinal illness in snowmobilers who recently vacationed in the Big Horn Mountains in northern Wyoming has prompted a multi-agency, multi-state investigation to determine the cause of the illnesses.

“The Wyoming Department of Health (WDH) first learned of the illnesses after receiving a call from a Minnesota resident who had recently spent several days with some friends snowmobiling in the Big Horn Mountains,” said Scott Seys, an infectious disease epidemiologist with the WDH. “The individual said that he and several others in his group developed stomach cramps, nausea, vomiting and diarrhea during their trip in early February,” Seys said.

Detailed interviews of the individuals, by staff from the Minnesota and Wyoming Departments of Health asking about food and water consumed during the trip, have yet to identify a common source that could have caused the illnesses.

Reports of illness in snowmobilers from Montana and North Dakota who vacationed in the Big Horn Mountains have also been received by the WDH. A total of 36 snowmobilers have been identified who appear to have developed the same type of gastrointestinal illness: eight from Minnesota, 13 from North Dakota, one from Montana and 14 from Wyoming. Staff from the Montana and North Dakota Departments of Health have also been assisting with the investigation.

“The snowmobilers ate at a variety of restaurants and stayed at several different motels or lodges during

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their trips,” said Annette Heryford, Field Epidemiologist with the WDH. “Our investigation involves interviewing each snowmobiler who became ill to determine where he ate and consumed water during his trip. In addition, we are interviewing other individuals who vacationed in the Big Horn Mountains since the first of the year to see if there may be additional cases.”

“Most of the individuals who developed illness became sick on the second day of their vacation and were sick for about 48 hours” said Dr. Gary Melinkovich, Staff Physician with the WDH.

Stool specimens from sick individuals are being tested for a variety of disease agents, including bacteria, such as *E. coli* and *Salmonella*; parasites, including *Giardia* and *Cryptosporidium* and viruses, such as Norwalk virus and other caliciviruses.

The Wyoming Department of Agriculture has been assisting with the investigation. “As the Department of Health investigators identify eating establishments that the snowmobilers visited, Department of Agriculture staff have been visiting those establishments to review their food safety procedures and to take water samples,” said Laurie Leis, Manager of the Department’s Consumer Health Services Program.

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