

57 sickened after eating at restaurant

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The Barry-Eaton District Health Department was cited as saying that dozens of people have become sick after eating at Carrabba's Italian Grill on West Saginaw Highway last weekend and officials are expecting to hear from more today. Medical Director Dr. Robert Schirmer was cited as saying that as of Thursday afternoon, 57 people had reported their illnesses to the health department, adding, "But that number will grow," as officials continue to find and interview people who ate at the restaurant and that as many as 18 employees became sick. So far, everyone who was sickened ate there Saturday or Sunday, and health officials believe the outbreak was contained to those dates.

The cause of the illness is not known, although Schirmer suspects a highly contagious, Norwalk-like virus, which he said is responsible for most food-associated illnesses.

He hopes to confirm the cause by early next week.

Joe Kadow, executive vice president of Outback Steakhouse Inc., which owns Carrabba's Italian Grill, was cited as saying the restaurant is cooperating with the health department's investigation and has discarded all food prepared Saturday through Monday, adding in a statement that, "We have and will continue to review and reinforce all of our food safety procedures with our employees and we have tested all of our equipment to ensure all are in compliance with manufacturers' standards and those of the health department."

An employee who answered the phone Thursday said the restaurant is open for business and has been all week.

The first report of illness came at about 4:30 p.m. Monday.

The health department compiled a list of patrons that evening and began contacting people on the list Tuesday.