

Investigation

3.11B: Foodborne Pathogen Case

Grace is a 28 year old female who presents in your office with complaints of recent onset abdominal cramps, diarrhea and vomiting, fever, and pain in her joints. Realizing the complaints are not specific to any particular illness, you are prepared to ask some questions and listen carefully to the responses.

Here is the conversation between you and Grace:

You: When did the symptoms begin?

Grace: I started having abdominal cramps early Wednesday morning. By noon I vomited and had a fever. That night I started having pain in my joints. It has been three days and I don't really feel any better. Do I have the flu?

You: The flu is a possibility. Has anyone else in the family had similar symptoms?

Grace: Well, yes. My boyfriend has similar symptoms that started at the same time. He is still sick as well, but he won't get up to come to see you.

You: That is interesting. I would not expect both you and your boyfriend to come down with the flu at exactly the same time. Usually one person begins to feel ill and then the next person feels sick a few days later. What types of foods did you eat in the days prior to feeling sick?

Grace: My boyfriend bought a rotisserie chicken at the market that didn't look quite as well cooked as I would have preferred. We ate it anyway; that was Monday evening. We ate a little later than planned, so the chicken sat out a few extra hours.

You: Well, Grace. This does sound like perhaps you and your boyfriend have a case of food poisoning. Your symptoms do not sound like you have a foodborne virus or parasite pathogen. Rather it sounds more like a bacterial origin. I am concerned that the chicken did not appear to be well cooked. Also, you said it sat out for several hours. This could well be the source of your illness. In order to know for sure we need to send a specimen of your stool to the laboratory. They will conduct a microscopic examination and grow a culture to identify the exact organism. Then we will know whether prescribing an **antibiotic** will be helpful or not. In the meantime I recommend you rest and drink lots of water so you don't become **dehydrated**.