What is an outbreak?

Public health authorities define an outbreak as more cases of a particular disease or condition than expected over a given period of time OR a single unusual illness, or two or more cases of a specific illness (e.g., foodborne illness) with a suspected common exposure history. Defining an outbreak as multiple cases at the same time will not always be accurate. Here are some things to consider:

**Pathogen-How does a person become infected? How severe is it?**

- **Is it spread person-to-person through contact or coughing?**
- **Do infections occur after an insect bite or contact with an animal?**
- **Can it be found in contaminated food and water?**
- **Can it be spread through contact with infected body fluids or on soiled surfaces?**

**Are there times in the year that you would normally expect more cases? Would you expect to see any cases at all (like mumps, measles, etc.)?**

- Norovirus
- Influenza
- RSV

**OR**

**Are you seeing cases OUTSIDE of their normal seasons (i.e., flu in the summer)?**

- Cryptosporidiosis
- Campylobacter
- Salmonella
- Giardiasis
- Campylobacter
- Salmonella

**Can you link similar cases over the same place and time?**

Have you observed spread of the illness over a single incubation period for a disease within a congregate setting such as a school, hospital, care facility, or correctional facility? With diarrheal illnesses, did multiple people become ill at the same time?

**If you notice increased disease activity, and you are not sure if it is an outbreak, contact your local health department for guidance.**