

Hepatitis from page A1

The latest spate of cases has been traced to Roosevelt's. Kelli Feldman, 25, of Birmingham, is one of 17 people believed to be sickened in Oakland County's latest single-source outbreak of hepatitis A. Reports of more victims are expected, according to health officials.

Feldman is the plaintiff in a civil suit filed Tuesday against the establishment, contending owners were negligent when they served contaminated food or beverages. Like the suit filed earlier in the

week on behalf of two men who became sick after frequenting the billiard parlor, Feldman's suit asks for in excess of \$25,000.

Almost four weeks after attending a friend's going away party, Birmingham resident Kelli Feldman became ill. She experienced tiredness, nausea, vomiting and jaundice — symptoms commonly associated with hepatitis A. On July 6, she called in sick to the mortgage company where she worked, and she hasn't returned to work since.

Her case has been assigned to circuit Judge Richard D. Kuh. No hearing date has been scheduled as of Wednesday.

Feldman's attorney, Amy Chayet-Shapiro, said three other people have contacted her office since the suit was filed. They will likely become part of the suit, she said.

Hepatitis A causes swelling and tenderness of the liver, with symptoms including abdominal pain, fever, tiredness, loss of appetite and nausea followed by yellowing of the skin and eyes.

It is most commonly spread from person to person by hands contaminated by feces. Outbreaks may be caused by food or water being contamination by feces.

While the disease generally causes sickness that can last a

week or longer, two deaths have been linked to the hepatitis A, and elderly man in 1997 and middle-aged man last year. In both cases, the victims had other health problems that were complicated by hepatitis A, according to Dr. Carolyn A. Bird, director of medical services for the Oakland County Health Division.

Health officials inoculated other employees at Roosevelt's, said Gmerek, and held three seminars on the importance of hand washing and other good hygiene measures that prevent the spread of hepatitis A and other diseases.

"We have always emphasized good hygiene," Gmerek said Wednesday. "But it happened despite our best efforts."

Business was slow Tuesday, Gmerek said, mainly regulars who expressed support. "I expected a lot of irate phone calls," he said. "But most of the calls were from reasonable people who wanted information."

This is the second single-source outbreak of hepatitis A in three years. In 1997, more than 40 people came down with hepatitis A after eating coleslaw at the Stage Co., a deli in West Bloomfield.

Amy Chayet-Shapiro's law firm in Southfield, Thruway, Chayet & Welner handled law suits on behalf of 10 of those sickened. All but one of those people have reached out of court settlements ranging from \$10,000 to \$50,000, depending on individual circumstances, said Harvey Chayet, a partner in the firm.

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