

Both epidemic and outbreak are usually defined as the occurrence of more cases in a place (or population) and time than expected. This is clearly above the "expected" or background rate of gastroenteritis in a community. The terms "outbreak" and "epidemic" are used interchangeably by many epidemiologists, although some consider the term "outbreak" to refer to a more localized situation, and "epidemic" to refer to a more widespread (and perhaps prolonged) situation. Traditionally, the term "epidemic" has been more frightening to the public than "outbreak," so most field investigators have used the latter term when talking to the press or public. On the other hand, the term "epidemic" is now at risk of being overused, particularly for social problems to which advocates want to draw public attention and concern. Of the 75 persons interviewed, 46 were ill with gastroenteritis during a 24-hour time period.