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Foodborne Illnesses Affect 76 Million People.

Almost one-third of the US population is made ill annually from eating food containing bacteria or viruses.

Bacteria such as Salmonella, Shigella, E. coli O157:H7, and Campylobacter are the culprits that cause major outbreaks of illness affecting thousands of people yearly. But now there is another germ making people ill. It is a virus called Norovirus. Up until last year it had been known as Norwalk or Norwalk-like virus. Outbreaks of norovirus gastroenteritis have taken place in restaurants, cruise ships, nursing homes, hospitals, schools, banquet halls, summer camps, and family dinners – in other words, places where people have consumed water and/or food prepared or handled by others. It is estimated that as many as half of all food-related outbreaks of illness may be caused by norovirus. In many of these cases, sick food handlers were implicated.

Many local and state health departments require that food handlers with gastroenteritis *not* work until 2 or 3 days after they feel better. In addition, because the virus continues to be present in the stool for as long as 2 to 3 weeks after the person feels better, strict hand washing after using the bathroom and before handling food items is important in preventing the spread of this virus. Food handlers who were recently sick can be given different duties in the restaurant so that they do not have to handle food (for example, working as cashier or host).

People who are sick with norovirus illness can often vomit violently, without warning, and the vomit is infectious; therefore, any surfaces near the vomit should be promptly cleaned and disinfected with bleach solution and then rinsed. Furthermore, food items that may have become contaminated with norovirus should be thrown out. Linens (including clothes, towels, tablecloths, napkins) soiled to any extent with vomit or stool should be promptly washed at high temperature.

Oysters should be obtained from reputable sources and appropriate documentation kept. Washing raw vegetables thoroughly before eating and appropriate disposal of sewage and soiled diapers also help to reduce the spread of norovirus and prevent illness. In small catering businesses or family owned or operated restaurants, sick children and infants in diapers must be excluded from the establishment.

Is There A Solution?

The viruses are controlled with proper cooking and proper employee **HANDWASHING** and **WAIT STAFF PRACTICES!**

Handwashing must be done upon arriving for work, after toilet use, and, especially, before handling ready-to-eat foods. Remember, Idaho follows the **No Bare Hand** policy.

Of particular concern is the practice of employees going to work when they are ill. Often, the employee gets the message that “no work equals no pay,” or “no



NO BARE HANDS
cont...

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work may mean you are fired.” The employee and employer must both understand the possible consequences of working while ill.

1. You may infect customers. Illness outbreak can cause negative publicity, loss of customers, lawsuits, closure of the business.
2. May make fellow employees ill and expand the outbreak to their own family and other workplaces.
3. If an employee falsely reports being sick, then the manager may have no choice but to dismiss the employee. Managers often have a difficult decision whether to allow a “sick” employee to stay home or, believing the claim to be untrue, insist the employee work when ill, possibly spreading the disease to customers and coworkers.



Wait staff handling cups, eating utensils, and dirty dishes can all lead to contamination of dishware and food. Remember, grabbing a dirty glass by the rim is like **putting your fingers in the customer’s mouth**. You will get their saliva on your fingers and then pass it on to the next items you touch such as clean silverware, serving utensils or your own sandwich.

The need to discuss illnesses during the hiring process.

Employee Illness Policy – An Example.

How often does an employee inform you of illnesses? Do you and your employees have a written policy concerning illness? Do you know the UNICODE rules for employee health and reporting to the health department? (See UNICODE section 400.)

The FDA (Food and Drug Administration) has suggested discovering during the job interview whether an employee has experienced certain illnesses, is currently ill, and will agree to report illnesses to the employer as is required by current UNICODE (section 400). Idaho rules also restrict ill employees from work, in some cases requiring lab specimens prove they are well.

Examples of the forms are in Annex 7 of the FDA Model Code:

<http://www.cfsan.fda.gov/~dms/fc01-toc.html>

CDHD Cooling Study

Rapidly Cooling Potentially Hazardous Foods Prevents Bacterial Growth

Is your refrigeration unit keeping your food below 45° F all the time? Does the refrigeration unit warm up when hot foods are placed inside for cooling? Does the ambient air temperature change, causing potentially hazardous foods to rise above 45° F?

The Central District Health Department has been using electronic temperature recording devices (see March 2003 issue of this newsletter) to determine how restaurant operators were doing in **cooling foods rapidly**. We have received some interesting results.

First lets review what is written in the Unicode about cooling potentially hazardous foods:

“Cooling from 140° F to 70° F in 2 hours, and then from 70° F to 45° F in the next 4 hours is necessary to prevent the growth of bacteria that can cause food poisoning or a foodborne illness. Potentially hazardous foods shall be cooled as appropriate to the food by placing the food in shallow pans, by breaking the food down into smaller or thinner portions, by using rapid chill equipment, by stirring the food in a container placed in an ice water bath, by using containers that facilitate heat transfer, by adding ice as an ingredient or by other methods approved by the health authority.”



Food Review is sent quarterly, free of charge to all licensed food establishments in our health district. We hope to include news of interest and importance. Topic ideas or articles written by the readers are welcome to be sent to: Editor, Food Review, CDHD, 707 N. Armstrong Pl., Boise, ID 83704. Extra copies of the newsletter are available at your local Health Department office.

This rule allows you to come up with a suitable method that assures rapid cooling. **Do you know if your method is rapidly cooling foods to prevent the growth of harmful levels of bacteria?** You can verify that you are rapidly cooling potentially hazardous foods correctly by keeping a time and temperature log. We have included the log with this newsletter.

Over the past few months, CDHD loaned several electronic temperature recording devices to restaurant operators to test their food cooling processes. Many operators learned that they needed to revise their cooling process because the potentially hazardous food they were cooling was not meeting the Unicode requirement.

Simple corrections were made. Operators were very good at making changes to cool foods quicker. Changes include the use of ice wands, smaller portions, ice water baths, metal containers, thinner portions and combinations of these methods.

Once you determine a method that works, we recommend you include the procedure in your staff training materials. When the plan is followed, and the same container, amount of ice or use of ice wands, stirring and amount of food is consistent each time, you will reduce your risk of having a foodborne illness outbreak.

Verify your Cooling Process with frequent temperature checks and the following:

- Consider the nature of the food – A thick, dense food like refried beans will take longer to cool than a thin broth.
- Use the proper type of container – Stainless steel containers transfer heat faster than plastic.
- Transfer food to shallow pans.
- Divide food contents
- Stir foods when applicable
- Leave cooling foods uncovered
- Consider refrigeration type and capacity.

[from 2001 Sysco Placesetter]

GIVE US A CALL:

We encourage you to contact us at the Central District Health Department to assist you in monitoring the cooling process through the use of the temperature recording devices. Please call your health inspector for more information or the Environmental Health Department at 327 – 7499.

SAFE FOOD PRODUCT COOKING & HOLDING TEMPERATURES / CRITICAL LIMITS

COLD HOLDING - All foods should be held 41° F or below. *

Corrective Action: If food is out of temperature for less than 4 hours, rapidly cool to 41° F or less within the remaining time period or discard.

COOKING	Poultry products:	165° F / 15 seconds
	Ground Beef, pork:	155° F / 15 seconds
	Eggs, fish, beef:	145° F / 15 seconds
	Rare roast beef:	130° F / 121 minutes
	All other foods:	145° F / 15 seconds
	Corrective Action:	Continue cooking

RECEIVING:
All PHFs must be at 41° F or less.

Corrective Action:
Reject food if not at proper temperature.

REHEATING - Reheat foods to 165° F within 2 hours.

Corrective Action: Discard if not reheated within 2 hours

* 41° F is FDA code recommendation.

HOT HOLDING - All foods should be held 140° F or above.

Corrective Action: If food is out of temperature for less than 4 hours, rapidly reheat to 165° F or greater within the remaining time period or discard.

COOLING - Cool cooked foods from 140° F to 70° F within 2 hours. Then continue to cool from 70° F to 41° F within 4 hours. Food products made from ingredients at room temperature must be cooled to 41° F within 4 hours.

Corrective Action: Reheat to 165° F and cool properly, serve, or discard.



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Reminder - Outside Dining Areas and Dogs.

When the weather warms, customers like to dine outside. Many establishments place a table or two in front of the business, others open up their formal, wait-service dining patios. The CDHD policy for dogs or other pets and outside dining areas is No Dogs Allowed in outside dining areas that are marked off by borders such as railings, rope, planters, etc. Dogs beside a table or chair are tolerated when there is no formal indication of an outside dining area other than the presence of chairs and a table or two on the sidewalk.



REMINDER:

Training Class Schedules are on the CDHD website: www.cdhd.org, then in the left margin click on classes@cdhd. We can also provide training at your facility, but do charge \$60/hour.

check out our website:

www.cdhd.org

