

# FOOD TALK



SANITATION TIPS FOR FOOD WORKERS

Fall 2012



Source: *The Bad Bug Book*

## Norovirus: One Bad Bug

## How to Prevent Serving Up Norovirus with Food

You've heard of Norovirus. It's one of the "Big Five" pathogens that the person in charge of an establishment must report to the regulatory authority, according to the Food and Drug Administration's 2009 model Food Code. Actually, Norovirus is listed first among the "Big Five" because it causes more foodborne illness than the other four put together.

Norovirus is often linked to contaminated water, raw clams and oysters, and salad ingredients. Outbreaks often happen in places where people are gathered close to each other, such as on cruise ships, nursing homes, day-care centers — or restaurants. Most foodborne outbreaks are caused by food contaminated by a food worker just before it is served.

The symptoms of illness can include intense vomiting, diarrhea, nausea, stomach cramps, headache, a low fever, and muscle aches. Although most individuals recover within three days, the illness can be serious for the elderly, young children, and individuals with weak immune systems.

### Prevent Contamination

If you are the person in charge of your establishment, you need to make sure every food worker takes preventive steps to help protect customers

### High-touch surfaces such as door knobs and hand rails should get special attention

and staff from Norovirus infection. The most important step is proper handwashing after using the restroom and before preparing food.

If a customer throws up in your establishment, you must make sure all contaminated surfaces are immediately cleaned and sanitized, and that whoever does the cleaning wears protective gear to prevent becoming infected. And any clothes or linens that become soiled should be washed thoroughly to remove contamination. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention recommends:

- Handling soiled items carefully to avoid shaking particles off onto other surfaces,
- Wearing protective cleaning gloves or disposable gloves while handling soiled items and washing hands after the gloves come off,
- Machine washing laundry items with detergent at the hottest cycle.

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Bathrooms and high-touch surfaces such as door knobs and hand rails should get special attention for cleaning and sanitizing, the CDC says.

Unfortunately, it is possible to be infected with norovirus and have no symptoms, but still spread the virus to others.

The FDA model Food Code says an employee who has been excluded or restricted from work because

of norovirus infection should not be allowed to return until the person in charge gets approval from the regulatory authority. To get the authority's approval, the employee must either provide a document from a health practitioner to say he or she is free of Norovirus, or must be free of any symptoms for 48 hours.



## Be Wise, Sanitize

Because Norovirus is so infectious, it is very important to sanitize contaminated surfaces after first cleaning off any soil. Sanitizing means treating with heat or chemicals to reduce the number of germs to a safe level.

If water is used at the sanitizing stage in a warewashing machine, utensils should reach a surface temperature of 71 degrees C (160 degrees F) for effective sanitizing, according to the FDA model Food Code. It is often easier to sanitize with chemicals, either chlorine (as in bleach), iodine or "quats" (the more common name for quaternary ammonium compounds). The first rule in using chemical sanitizers is to follow the manufacturer's instructions.

## Why All the Fuss About Employee Health?

An effective employee health policy can be a challenge to apply, but it is necessary to protect your customers – and yourself – from dangerous infections.



The Food and Drug Administration's 2009 model Food Code has quite a lot to say about employee health, but the key message is that every establishment needs to have a policy for how it will prevent ill employees from spreading infection.

The model Code recommends taking a risk-based approach and it requires employees to report illness to the person in charge. It also requires managers to make it clear to employees – even to anyone applying for a job – that certain illnesses must be reported to the person in charge.

Workers must report not just symptoms but even being exposed to any of the "Big Five" pathogens: Norovirus, *Salmonella* typhi, Shiga-toxin producing *E. coli*, Hepatitis A virus and *Shigella*. Exposure could include an illness outbreak at a family event, a church picnic or any event where a worker may have prepared or consumed food linked to the illness. Exposure could also include living in the same household with some-

one who comes down with one of the diseases or who works where there was a confirmed outbreak.

The regulators know these reporting requirements are hard to apply in practice because workers typically do not get paid if they are excluded from work. So they try to balance the need to protect public health with the needs of the employee and the employer.

### Risk-Based Approach

The model Code lists four separate risk levels. Level 1 covers employees who are most likely to be shedding high levels of a pathogen. These workers are the most restricted or excluded from working

**Restricted means limited to non-food tasks. Excluded means staying home from work.**

with food. Restricted means limited to non-food tasks. Excluded means that they may not work in the establishment.

Level 2 deals with employees diagnosed with illness but who don't have symptoms. They are less likely to be shedding high levels of the infectious bug.

## Can You Find the Sanitation and Safety Errors?



Look closely at this kitchen scene. There are at least ten sanitation and safety violations. See how many you can find:

- 9-10?** Excellent! You would make a good person in charge
- 7-8?** Good! But watch out for the errors you missed.
- 4-6?** Time for a food safety course.
- 1-3?** Maybe working with food is really not for you.

- A refrigerator door left open
  - Garbage on the kitchen floor
  - A dirty mop in the kitchen
  - Dripping water from sink
  - A handwashing sink with "Out of Order" sign
  - Holding utensils by the wrong end
  - Putting fingers inside drinking glasses
  - Wearing high heeled shoes
  - Wearing big dangling earrings
  - Spiders and spider webs
  - Cracked plaster walls
- Answers:**

But they may still be restricted or excluded if they are working with sensitive individuals such as the elderly, young children, or individuals with weakened immune systems.

Level 3 is for employees diagnosed with a specific infectious agent but who never develop symptoms of the illness. For these, the Code calls for exclusion or restric-

tion until the employees are no longer a risk for spreading infection.

Level 4 is the lowest level of risk. It covers employees who have not been diagnosed with illness and who don't have symptoms, but who may have been exposed. For these, the recommendation is to restrict them until the time between exposure and symptoms is over.

## Test Yourself on Norovirus

Here is a quick quiz to test your knowledge of Norovirus and how to control it:

1. Symptoms of Norovirus infection include:
  - a. High fever.
  - b. Yellow eyes.
  - c. Intense vomiting.
  - d. Sneezing.
2. You can help prevent contamination of food by Norovirus if you:
  - a. Wash your hands after using the restroom and before preparing food.
  - b. Do not touch ready-to-eat food with your bare hands.
  - c. Tell your person in charge if you have symptoms of the stomach flu such as vomiting or diarrhea.
  - d. All of the above.
3. The "Big Five" foodborne pathogens include:
  - a. Norovirus, *Listeria monocytogenes*, *Salmonella typhi*, *Clostridium perfringens* and Shiga-toxin producing *E. coli*.
  - b. Norovirus, *Salmonella typhi*, Shiga-toxin producing *E. coli*, Hepatitis A and *Shigella*.
  - c. *Salmonella typhi*, Shiga-toxin producing *E. coli*, Hepatitis A virus, *Campylobacter* and *Shigella*.
  - d. Norovirus, *Salmonella typhi*, Shiga-toxin producing *E. coli*, *Campylobacter* and *Shigella*.
4. If a customer becomes ill in your establishment and vomits, you should:
  - a. Carefully clean and sanitize every surface that has come into contact with the vomit.
  - b. Wash linens or clothing that may be contaminated.
  - c. Pay special attention to cleaning and sanitizing high-touch areas such as door knobs and handrails.
  - d. All of the above.

Answers: 1 (c), 2 (d), 3 (b), 4 (d).

Sources: The Bad Bug Book; CDC; 2009 FDA model Food Code; Essentials of Food Safety and Sanitation - Food Safety Fundamentals.



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