FOOD TALK

SANITATION TIPS FOR FOOD WORKERS

WINTER 2011-2012

What you don't need in your kitchen! See the cartoon on page 3 for more code violations...

Also in this issue...

Let's Get Personal... About Hygiene

Have you ever wondered why smoking cigarettes and other tobacco products is not allowed in kitchens? Could a little cigarette ash in the food really hurt anyone? Actually, smoking cigarettes can cause many problems in a foodservice setting and one of them is linked to what food safety experts call "personal hygiene."

Besides all the smoke they inhale and all the second-hand smoke they share with their workmates—and, yes, the possibility of ash falling in the food—smokers frequently touch their mouths and noses, which can quickly spread any infections they have to their hands. This contamination can end up in the food or on food contact surfaces, and that can cause customers or co-workers to become infected.

The Food and Drug Administration explains this in a section of the 2009 model Food Code which gives the public health reasons behind what's in the Code. In Annex 3, it says:

> "Smoking or eating by employees in food preparation areas is prohibited because of the potential that the hands, food, and food-contact surfaces may become contaminated. Insanitary personal practices such as scratching the head, placing the fingers in or about the mouth or nose, and indiscriminate and uncovered sneezing or coughing may result in food contamination. Poor hygienic practices by employees may also adversely affect consumer confidence in the establishment."

Protect yourself and others from illness through good personal hygiene!

Another good reason to maintain proper personal hygiene is to protect *yourself* from contamination! You never know which food or ingredient that comes into your establishment may be contaminated, so you need to focus on reducing the risk of foodborne illness—to protect yourself as well as others from illness. Do you know what ground beef, ground turkey, cantaloupes, papayas, pine nuts and alfalfa sprouts have in common? Besides all being foods, they don't have much in common except that they were all linked to multi-state foodborne outbreaks of salmonellosis in 2011.

So do yourself a favor and maintain good personal hygiene. This includes wearing clean clothing and maintaining good personal habits, such as keeping your fingernails short and clean, and using hair restraints. But, as you probably know by now, washing your hands is the real key to good personal hygiene.

At the Cutting Edge of Food Safety

They say it was the cutting board that led to the requirement in the FDA model Food Code that equipment and utensils be designed to be "smooth and easily cleanable" as well as long-lasting. Cutting boards are well-known for causing contamination problems. If a cutting board becomes cracked, pitted and chipped and is saturated with grease and food residues, it is almost impossible to wash and sanitize properly, so it becomes a place for bacteria to lurk.

Boards made out of improper materials such as plywood or soft pine can be the source of splinters in food. But the biggest hazard is that the cutting board can be a source of cross contamination.

Raw meats and poultry are frequently contaminated with such organisms as *Salmonella*. If the cutting board isn't thoroughly washed and sanitized with a disinfecting solution after contact with raw product, any other foods placed on the board—raw vegetables for salads or cooked meat, for example—will pick up the bacteria and, being moist and warm, will provide a breeding ground for bacterial growth.

Because of the hazards associated with cutting boards, you should take the following precautions when using them:

- Make sure boards are in good condition, free of cuts and damaged areas.
- Wash your hands thoroughly before and after using cutting boards.
- Use only cutting boards made of hard, durable, smooth and easily cleanable materials.
- Wash and sanitize the cutting board before and after using it.

Cutting boards must be washed and sanitized when changing from a raw to a finished or cooked food item. One capful of bleach in a gallon of water makes an effective sanitizer, for example. But you need to check the concentration routinely. And there are other effective sanitizers available.

Why it's Essential to Cool Food Properly

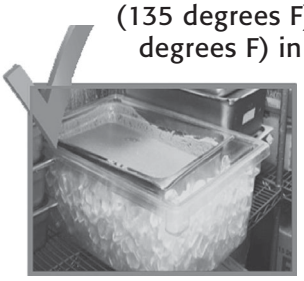
Here's what happens: You prepare a large batch of hot food—let's say soup—and store it in stacked pans in the walk-in cooler to be used later. Because the pans are stacked, the food does not cool quickly enough. Many hours later, some of it is still warm enough to allow bacteria to grow rapidly, even though the food is in the refrigerator. Later, or perhaps the next day, you take the food out and reheat it, but the damage has been done and the food may cause your customers to become very ill.

So, you need to cool foods rapidly if they will be stored and served later. One way to cool large volumes of food is to place it in shallow containers of four inches or less and to refrigerate it uncovered until it is cold. Another method is to use an ice bath.

The 2009 FDA model Food Code also allows the use of other cooling methods such as:

- Rapid cooling equipment.
- Containers that transfer heat rapidly.
- Stirring the food while in an ice bath.
- Adding ice as an ingredient.

You should check the temperature of the food to make sure it's cooling quickly enough. According to the 2009 Food Code, after cooking, potentially hazardous foods need to be cooled from 57 degrees C (135 degrees F) to 21 degrees C (70 degrees F) in two hours and to 5 degrees C (41 degrees F) or less within six hours.



This may seem to be a complicated formula, but food safety experts have worked out that this time and temperature balance prevents the food from being in the temperature "danger zone" long enough for bacteria to grow rapidly.

If the food appears not to be cooling quickly enough, divide it into two containers and cool these in separate ice baths, or switch to the shallow pan method. Shallow pans should also be used if the soup is too dense to stir easily.

No matter which cooling method you use, it's important to plan carefully to minimize cooling times.

(*Image source: FDA*)

Find the Sanitation Violations

Health inspectors would identify at least ten sanitation and personal hygiene violations in this kitchen scene. How many can you find?

9-10? Excellent! You would make a good food safety manager.

7-8? Pretty good. Just watch out for the problems you missed.

4-6? You could use a refresher course.

1-3? Yikes! Maybe food work is not for you.

Answers:

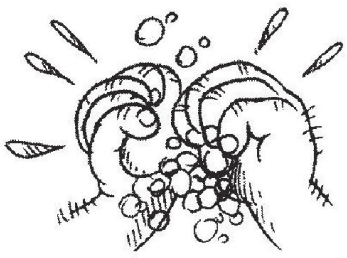
- Dripping pipes in the ceiling
- An uncovered garbage can
- Garbage on the floor
- Spilled liquid on the floor
- Poison stored with foods
- A mouse
- Cleaning materials left near food
- A food worker scratching her head (and with no hair restraint)
- A food worker smoking
- A food worker sneezing near food

Sanitation: What NOT to Do

- Don't leave garbage or liquid spills on the kitchen floor. Clean them up immediately.
- Don't allow garbage cans to become too full.
- Don't store poisonous materials above food products.
- Don't store detergents, drain cleaners, metal polishes, bleaches, insecticides or other chemicals near food products.

Personal Hygiene Means

Wash Your Hands!



Test Yourself on Food Safety

Try this quick test of your food safety knowledge. Select the best answer if more than one seems correct.

1. Good personal hygiene behavior includes:
   a. Keeping the kitchen clean.
   b. Controlling pests.
   c. Knowing when and how to wash your hands--and actually doing it.
   d. None of the above.

2. Foodborne illness is frequently caused by :
   a. Temperature abuse of food.
   b. Poor personal hygiene.
   c. Cross contamination.
   d. All of the above.

3. Frequent locations for cross contamination include:
   a. Floors.
   b. Overhead pipes.
   c. Cutting boards.
   d. None of the above.

4. According to the 2009 FDA model Food Code, cooked potentially hazardous foods that are being be cooled for storage need to drop in temperature from:
   a. 57 degrees C (135 degrees F) to 21 degrees C (70 degrees F) in two hours and to 5 degrees C (41 degrees F) within six hours.
   b. 57 degrees C (135 degrees F) to 7 degrees C (45 degrees F) in two hours.
   c. 57 degrees C (135 degrees F) to 5 degrees C (41 degrees F) in three hours.
   d. None of the above.

5. Which of the following must be used when rapidly cooling foods:
   a. A data logger.
   b. A shallow pan.
   c. A thermometer.
   d. None of the above.

Answers: 1(c), 2(d), 3(c), 4 (a), 5(c)

(Sources for this issue include the Food and Drug Administration and Essentials of Food Safety and Sanitation—Food Safety Fundamentals, Second Edition.)

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