

# FOOD TALK



SANITATION TIPS FOR FOOD WORKERS

FALL 2011



## Hurricanes, Floods and Power Outages, Oh My!

There was no warning when parts of southern California and western Arizona suffered a massive power outage on September 8. The huge outage was not caused by bad weather but by a sudden equipment failure. Many restaurants had to discard thousands of dollars worth of food because they had no way to prevent spoilage. Some establishments had to close when health authorities issued "boil water" notices and they were not prepared for that situation.

Sometimes there is advance warning of an emergency and some precious time to prepare. In late August, Hurricane Irene caused major flooding, wind damage and power outages all along the eastern United States and into Canada. This was a bigger and longer emergency, but at least food establishments had some time to prepare for what was heading their way.

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### Do You Have What You Need?

Does your food establishment have a plan for power outages or other emergencies? It's essential to plan ahead and to maintain some basic emergency supplies, including:

- A Flashlight with fresh batteries.
- A pen and paper.
- A battery-powered radio.
- First aid supplies.
- Emergency telephone numbers (for example, for the power company, the health department and the alarm company).

During the September 8 power cut, which lasted less than 24 hours, many restaurants were able to store their perishable food in refrigerated or freezer trucks, sometimes by arrangement with friendly suppliers. What would you do if your establishment lost power? You should plan to:

- Shut off electricity at the main breaker.
- Shut off or unplug individual equipment (and it's a good idea to tag it, so you won't accidentally restart any equipment when the power comes back on).
- Arrange for a refrigerator truck or other backup storage.

If your health department issues a "boil water" advisory, turn off the water supply and the circuit breakers for all equipment that uses water.

The Conference for Food Protection has created an Emergency Action Plan for Retail Food Establishments (available online at [www.foodprotect.org](http://www.foodprotect.org)). It includes a detailed checklist for what to do if your power goes out or if your water supply is interrupted. The plan also covers fires, floods, sewage back-up, and infectious disease incidents, as well as other less common emergencies.

To prepare for water supply emergencies, for example, you should:

- Consider preparing an “emergency menu” using

food that requires little or no water to prepare.

- Arrange a temporary system for washing hands.
- Maintain an inventory of single-service and single-use articles, bottled water, disposable gloves and hand sanitizer.
- Make an arrangement with a supplier of bottled water or a licensed drinking water hauler so you will have an alternative source of water during an emergency.
- Make an arrangement with a supplier of ice so you will have access to ice during an emergency.

## Cantaloupes, *Listeria* and What You Can Do

Have you been following the media reports about the foodborne illness outbreak linked to cantaloupes contaminated with *Listeria*? This was the first recorded outbreak in the United States caused by contamination of whole cantaloupes by *Listeria monocytogenes*—to give this dangerous bug its full name.

*Listeria* is more usually linked to contaminated deli meats and raw dairy products such as soft cheeses made with unpasteurized milk. The illness caused by *Listeria* is known as listeriosis and it is very serious. It can cause pregnant women to lose their babies and can kill older adults and individuals with weakened immune systems. And there is a particular problem with *Listeria* because these bugs can grow even in the refrigerator.

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention reported four separate strains of *Listeria* in the outbreak linked to cantaloupe from Jensen Farms in Colorado. Federal, state and local investigators found three of the outbreak strains in a packing facility and two in a cold storage area.

*Listeria* often exists in soil, water and in animals, so contamination of the melon is possible during the growing and packing processes. The bad bugs can also make it all the way inside the melons, or they can be transferred to the inside when the whole melons are cut.

You can't prevent contamination in the field or in a packing facility, but you can do everything possible to prevent contaminated fruit from making your customers sick, either directly or through cross-contamination with other food served in your establishment.

It is especially important to clean refrigerators and

other food preparation surfaces.

*Listeria* can hide in processing facilities, often in drains and ventilation systems. In some cases, new construction or modifications at the plant allows the bug to get onto the processing equipment and from there into the food.

Ready-to-eat deli foods can become contaminated after being cooked but before they are sealed into packages.

Outbreaks of listeriosis are sometimes linked to ready-to-eat foods such as hot dogs, luncheon meats, cold cuts, soft cheeses, deli-style meats, and poultry. For ready-to-eat foods, we have to trust manufacturers to keep their products free of the bug.

*Listeria* contamination is not a problem in foods that you thoroughly cook or reheat to 74 degrees C. (165 degrees F.).



### What You Can Do

You can help prevent foodborne illness caused by *Listeria* if you:

- Wipe up any spills in the refrigerator immediately and clean and sanitize the refrigerator regularly.
- Keep precooked or ready-to-eat foods refrigerated at 5 degrees Celsius (41 degrees Fahrenheit) or below.
- Use ready-to-eat food by the expiration date on the label.
- Keep foods associated with *Listeria* in the coldest part of the cooler.
- Keep uncooked meats separate from vegetables, cooked foods and ready-to-eat foods.
- Wash hands, knives and cutting boards thoroughly after preparing uncooked foods.

## Take Special Care with Potentially Hazardous Foods

The deadly outbreak of listeriosis linked to melons is a reminder of why we need to do everything we can to protect customers—and ourselves—from foodborne illness. The 2009 FDA model Food Code lists cut melons as a potentially hazardous food (PHF) that requires time and temperature control for safety (TCS) to prevent the growth of pathogens or the formation of toxins.

Melon portions may be contaminated during cutting or the removal of rind, when pathogens on the rind are spread by the knife blade. Removing contamination, especially on melons with “netted” rinds, is very difficult. If whole melons have visible signs of decay or damaged or cracked rinds, that is a warning sign and you should consider not using them because of the increased risk. When in doubt about damaged or bruised product—THROW IT OUT!

One way to limit the risk of disease would be to avoid using potentially hazardous foods. But this is not always possible, because the list includes many of the most popular foods and ingredients.

Here is a partial list of foods that are usually viewed as potentially hazardous:

- Cut melons
- Cut tomatoes
- Cream-filled baked goods
- Custards
- Tofu
- Mashed potatoes
- Cooked beans
- Meat
- Poultry
- Milk
- Eggs
- Fish
- Gravies
- Soups
- Rice
- Pasta
- Meat sauces
- Meat and potato salads
- Baked potatoes
- Cooked vegetables



## Don't Let These Bad Bugs Hurt Your Customers

Dangerous Bugs	Some Risky Foods	At-Risk Groups
<b>Salmonella</b>	Raw or undercooked eggs. Caesar salad dressing, soft-cooked eggs, some puddings and custards, mousse, sauces, such as Hollandaise, made with raw eggs.	Older adults, young children and individuals with weak immune systems.
<b>Listeria monocytogenes</b>	Deli meats; raw dairy products such as soft cheeses made with unpasteurized milk.	Pregnant women, older adults, young children, and individuals with weak immune systems.
<b>E. coli O157:H7</b>	Raw or undercooked meat, such as undercooked hamburger.	Older adults, young children and individuals with weak immune systems.
<b>Vibrio vulnificus and other vibrios, hepatitis A</b>	Raw or undercooked molluscan shellfish, raw clams or oysters on the half shell.	Especially those with liver disease or alcoholism, and those with weak immune systems.
<b>Parasites, Vibrio parahaemolyticus</b>	Raw fish such as sushi, ceviche or tuna carpaccio.	Older adults and individuals with weak immune systems.

## Test Yourself on Food Safety

Try this quick test of your food safety and emergency preparedness know-how.

1. *Listeria* contamination is most often found in:
  - a. Oysters on the half shell.
  - b. Undercooked hamburger.
  - c. Deli meats and raw dairy products.
  - d. None of the above.
2. Your establishment's emergency supplies should include:
  - a. A cordless phone.
  - b. A flashlight with fresh batteries.
  - c. A small wrench.
  - d. All of the above.
3. In a power outage, you should:
  - a. Shut off electricity at the breaker.
  - b. Shut off or unplug equipment that uses electricity.
  - c. Check in with the health department.
  - d. All of the above.

4. To help protect customers against *Listeria*, you should:
  - a. Wash produce that shows signs of spoilage.
  - b. Clean and sanitize the refrigerator regularly.
  - c. Avoid potentially hazardous foods.
  - d. None of the above.
5. For interruptions in the water supply, you should:
  - a. Arrange for a supply of ice.
  - b. Arrange for a supply of uncontaminated water.
  - c. Have a supply of single-service articles.
  - d. All of the above.
6. *Vibrio vulnificus* is most dangerous for:
  - a. Young children.
  - b. Healthy adults.
  - c. Individuals with liver disease.
  - d. None of the above.

*Answers: 1 (c), 2 (b), 3 (d), 4 (b), 5 (d), 6 (c). Ooops and apologies: An early edition of our summer issue gave incorrect answers for questions 1 and 3. The correct answer was (b).*

(Sources for this issue include the Conference for Food Protection and Essentials for Food Safety and Sanitation: Food Safety Fundamentals (Second Edition).

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