FOOD TALK

SANITATION TIPS FOR FOOD WORKERS SUMMER 2011

Also in this issue...

Cooking Outdoors When it's Hot! Hot! Hot!

"If you can't stand the heat, get out of the kitchen." That advice may not really help at this time of the year, when it's probably much hotter outside than inside your kitchen. And you might already be outdoors, preparing food at a temporary event.

You might not like the summer heat, but bacteria just love it. They thrive when it's hot and humid. To make things worse, there are more insects around to spread contamination. Cooking outdoors calls for some special care, because you don't have the same controlled cooking, refrigeration, and washing facilities that are available in your permanent kitchen.

If you are planning for a temporary event, the first thing you should do is check with your local health department about permits and code requirements. They will want to hear about your menu, how you will prepare it and the precautions you will take to prevent contamination.

You should think about food safety when you are designing a booth. The ideal booth should have an overhead covering, which helps prevent contamination of the food from above. The booth should be enclosed except for the serving window and should have only one door or flap for entry. Only food workers should be allowed inside. And the cooking surfaces should be located toward the back of the booth to protect customers from burns or splashes of hot grease.

Always follow this simple rule: "If in doubt, throw it out."

Most outbreaks at temporary events are caused by a lack of temperature control. So, keep hot food hot and cold food cold and out of the temperature danger zone—which is between five and 57 degrees Celsius (between 41 and 135 degrees Fahrenheit), according to the 2009 FDA model Food Code.

Food left out of refrigeration for more than two hours may not be safe to eat. Above 32 degrees C (90 degrees F), food should not be left out for more than one hour.

If food has been sitting out for a while and you are not sure if it's still safe, always follow this simple rule: "If in doubt, throw it out."

The Trouble with Sprouts

As a food handler, you can not control what happens to food before it arrives in your establishment. Instead, you must rely on suppliers to provide food that is grown and shipped safely. But once the food arrives in your door, you can take extra care not to contaminate it.

Some foods are a lot more risky than others. Take sprouts, for example. Unfortunately, the growing conditions for sprouts are also ideal for any bacteria that happen to be lurking on the seeds. So, although sprouts contain good bacteria that help make them a healthful food, they may also contain germs that can make consumers really ill or even kill them

Making customers ill is not good for business, so sprout growers have been trying hard to improve their food safety practices, by increasing testing for contamination, for example. Typically, the seeds are soaked in a sanitizing solution and are then germinated for approximately 4.5 days. But the sanitizing step does not remove all the bacteria.

Growers get the irrigation water tested for contamination because it contains a sampling of all of the bacteria in the sprouts. The idea is that the test results arrive back from the lab before the sprouts have finished growing, so, if there is a problem, the sprouts are not released for sale.

But this safety step does not always appear to work as planned. Perhaps you saw the recent reports about outbreaks of foodborne illness in Germany and France caused by a rare strain of *E. coli*—called *E. coli* O104:H4?

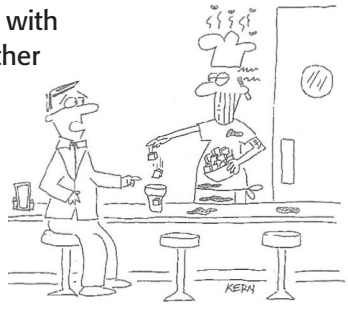
We are all familiar with *E. coli* O157:H7 because it has been the cause of outbreaks linked to hamburgers, juice, lettuce and other foods. But there are other kinds of *E. coli* that can also produce the poison—called a Shiga toxin—that causes illness and can cause a very serious condition known as Hemolytic Uremic Syndrome (HUS), which is often deadly. The *E. coli* O104:H4 strain involved in the German and French outbreaks was particularly powerful, so a significant proportion of those who become ill also suffered HUS.

Since 1996, there were at least 30 reported outbreaks in the United States linked with different types of raw and lightly cooked sprouts. Most of those were caused by *Salmonella* and *E. coli* O157:H7.

The Food and Drug Administration says at-risk individuals including children, the elderly, pregnant women, and persons with weakened immune systems, should avoid eating raw sprouts. The agency advises consumers to cook sprouts thoroughly and to ask that raw sprouts not be added to their food.

Be Careful with the Ice

Did you know that ice is a food and it should be treated with the same care as any other food?



So, for example, if you don't wash your hands after using the bathroom and then use a hand to scoop out ice, the ice may be contaminated. This can even happen if you use a glass or a scoop, if your hand makes contact with the ice.

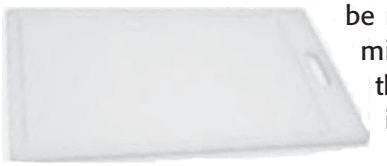
Bacteria and viruses can survive in ice. And, over time, mold can build up and create a dangerous poison. Toxic black mold can build up in about a month.

How often do the ice machines get cleaned and sanitized in your establishment? You need a good routine for keeping your ice clean. Try these tips:

- Don't store food containers in the ice.
- Use an ice scoop and store it outside the ice bin, not in the ice.
- Don't use containers for holding ice if they are also used for storing food or chemicals.
- Don't eat, drink or smoke around ice-making machines.
- Frequently clean and sanitize utensils used in ice.
- Hang ice containers upside down to keep them dry and off the floor. And don't stack one ice container inside another.
- Clean the area around the ice machine using a sponge and mild soap and water.
- Clean the ice-making machines once a week.

Anti-Germ Food Contact Materials: Handle with Care

Just because a cutting board a utensil or any other food contact material is treated with a built-in anti-germ product does not mean you can rely on it to be effective in every situation.



Food contact materials treated with silver or other antimicrobials, for example, have limited effects when they come into contact with organic material, according to two Norwegian researchers who tested numerous products.

More and more products are being sold with claims that they slow the growth of bacteria, molds and fungi, wrote Trond Møretrø and Solveig Langsrud, in a review published in the July issue of the *Journal of Food Protection*. So, for example, you can find cutting boards treated with new materials such as nanosilver. Nanotechnology works at a really tiny scale; a nanometer is about 10,000 times thinner than a human hair. There are numerous other products that use anti-germ materials, but the scientific evidence that they work in real-life situations, as opposed to in lab tests, is not available for most of them, the two researchers found.

One problem with silver is that it can sometimes be released very quickly, so the antimicrobial effect may wear off although the product is still being used in contact with food.

The researchers also found that the regulatory authorities tend to focus on the potential effects of the materials as poisons rather than whether they actually have an anti-germ effect in practical use.

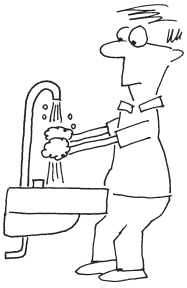
These treated food contact materials do not allow you to take any shortcuts in your food safety and sanitation steps.

Check Your Hand Washing Technique!

1. Wet hands with warm water

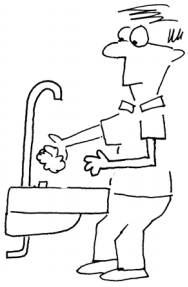
2. Rub hands with soap

3. Rub hands briskly for 20 seconds, including fingertips and between fingers

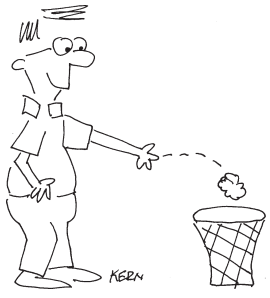


4. Rinse soap from hands

5. Dry hands with paper towel



6. Use paper towel to turn off faucet



7. Throw used paper towel in the trash

Test Yourself on Food Safety

Here's a quick test of your food safety knowledge. See if you can answer all six questions correctly.

1. The single biggest cause of foodborne illness in food establishments is:

   a. Cross contamination.
   b. Dirty hands.
   c. Inadequate cooking of foods.
   d. Inadequate cooling of foods.

2. Cross contamination happens when a foodborne hazard transfers from one food to another:

   a. On a cutting board.
   b. On a knife.
   c. On a food worker's hands.
   d. All of the above.

3. The best way to control the growth of bacteria in a food establishment is by controlling:

   a. Cross-contamination.
   b. Time and temperature.
   c. Temperature and water activity.
   d. None of the above.

4. You have to tell the manager if you come into contact with which of the following illnesses?

   a. Shigatoxin-producing *E. coli*
   b. *Shigella*
   c. Hepatitis A.
   d. All of the above.

5. What is the best way to thaw potentially hazardous foods?

   a. In the refrigerator.
   b. In the oven.
   c. Under running water.
   d. None of the above.

6. You can prevent cross contamination by:

   a. Washing your hands
   b. Separating raw and cooked foods.
   c. Keeping food contact surfaces clean and sanitized.
   d. All of the above

Answers: 1 (d), 2(d), 3(c), 4 (d), 5(a), 6(d).

(Sources for this issue: USDA Food Safety and Inspection Service, FDA 2009 Food Code, Journal of Food Protection.)

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