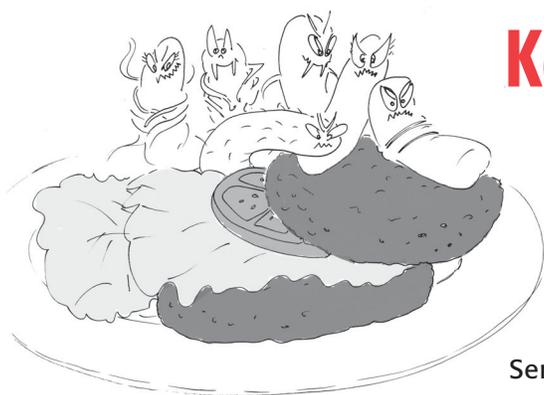


FOOD TALK



SANITATION TIPS FOR FOOD WORKERS

Summer 2012



Keeping Up With the *E. coli*

OK, so they're not as good looking as the Kardashians. In fact, you can't even see them without a microscope. But there is a lot going on in the tiny world of the *E. coli*.

Did you know that the U.S. Department of Agriculture has just declared a zero-tolerance for six strains of *E. coli* in addition to *E. coli* O157:H7? USDA's Food Safety and Inspection Service has begun testing raw beef trim—which is part of what makes up ground beef—for the six additional strains.

Most *E. coli* bacteria are not dangerous, but some are deadly. *E. coli* O157:H7 made a name for itself back in 1993 in a foodborne illness outbreak linked to contaminated hamburgers. And for many years it was mainly linked to ground beef. But in recent years it has been showing up in other food products, including lettuce, spinach, sprouts, unpasteurized milk, unpasteurized fruit juice, and even frozen cookie dough.¹

According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, illnesses linked to those six additional strains now outnumber those caused by O157:H7. They don't have cute names either, but are identified by numbers: O26, O45, O103, O111, O121 and O145. Like O157:H7, they can cause severe illness and even death, and young children and the elderly are at highest risk, along with individuals with weakened immune systems. USDA officials say the new test-and-hold policy will reduce exposure to unsafe meat products, because the products will not be released until the results of tests are known.

Keep these bad actors out of the food you serve to your customers!

"These strains of *E. coli* are an emerging threat to human health," said USDA Secretary Tom Vilsack when he announced the new policy.

Some *E. coli* strains produce a toxin, called Shiga toxin, that can cause serious illness, including bloody diarrhea, blood-clotting, kidney failure, and death. Not all of the Shiga-toxin producing *E. coli* can cause these problems, just those called enterohemorrhagic *E. coli* (EHEC).

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The experts believe it can take only 10 to 100 cells of *E. coli* O157:H7 to cause illness, although they think the infective dose for the other EHEC strains is slightly higher. Up to five percent of those who experience kidney failure actually die and those who survive have to receive years of expensive care.

What You Can Do

Because you can't control what happens to food before it reaches your establishment, you should do all you can to protect your customers from dangerous pathogens that may be hiding in the ingredients you use. One key safety step is to avoid spreading contamination from one food to another, for example, from food that will be cooked to other food that will be served raw or ready-to-eat.

It is a good idea to use separate color-coded cutting boards for meats, poultry, and fruits and vegetables.

You can't tell by looking whether meat has been cooked enough to destroy *E. coli* and other bad bugs. So it's good to get into the habit of using a thermometer to check that hamburgers, for example, are cooked to an internal temperature of 155 degrees F (68 degrees C.) and held at that temperature for at least 15 seconds, according to the 2009 FDA model Food Code.

The regulatory authorities are working hard to keep up with the *E. colis*. You need to do what you can to keep these bad actors out of the food you serve to your customers.

E. coli Can Cause Illness by Contaminating Uncooked Foods

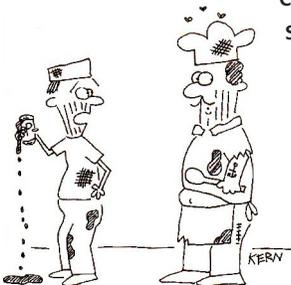
E. coli does not survive in food that is heated to 155 degrees Fahrenheit (68 degrees Celsius) for 15 seconds. But it can cause illness through cross contamination in your kitchen with foods that are served uncooked. You can prevent cross contamination by:

- Not touching ready-to-eat foods with your bare hands.
- Washing your hands frequently, including every time you change gloves.
- Washing and sanitizing cutting boards, utensils and other food contact surfaces before and after use.
- Keeping raw foods separated from one another and from ready-to-eat foods by storing them in separate coolers, preparing them on separate tables and cutting boards and using separate utensils.

Can You Tell when Canned Food is Spoiled?

It's not always easy to tell when canned food is spoiled. The simple rule is that you should never use foods from containers with loose or bulging lids, bulging, leaking or badly dented cans, or containers that are rusty or smell bad.

Cans or metal lids on glass jars can rust and cause tiny holes that let in



bacteria that cause spoilage. Or cans that are dented or crushed may also encourage spoilage. Some microorganisms in canned food do not produce gas, so the can may not swell up even though the food is spoiled. Contaminated cooling water sometimes leaks into the can through pinholes or poor seams and introduces bacteria that cause spoilage.

Here are some tips for storing canned foods:

- Store them in a cool, clean, dry place where temperatures are below 85 degrees F (29 degrees C). Between 60 and 70 degrees F (15 and 21 degrees C) is even better.
- It's a good practice to store cans off the floor to prevent contamination and to keep them

away from contact with water if the floor is mopped or flooded.

- Low-acid canned foods may be stored in a cupboard for up to five years. But for best quality, they should be used within one year.
- Use high-acid foods within 12 to 18 months. Foods stored for longer will still be safe to eat if the cans show no signs of spoilage or damage, but the color, flavor or nutritional value of the food may have deteriorated.

What to Do If a Customer Becomes Ill

It's a routine day in your foodservice establishment, but then someone calls to complain that he got sick from something he ate there. One of your waiters has symptoms of foodborne illness, including nausea, vomiting, fever and cramps. He thinks it's something he ate. What should you do?

Here's what:

- If you suspect a particular food, stop serving it.
- Call the health department.
- Save the suspect food.

The quicker you act to protect your customers, the less damage will be done to your business by a foodborne outbreak. Food poisonings don't normally go away. They often get worse until you find the cause.

Don't Throw it Away

If you think a particular food may be the problem, stop serving it immediately. But don't throw it away. Put it in the refrigerator so the health department can test it in the laboratory. But label it carefully to make sure no one uses the food. If it turns out to be contaminated, the data will help in locating the problem. If it isn't contaminated, you'll be off the hook. Either way, it helps you to have the food sampled.

Report the incident to the health department right away. The department will work with you to find and solve the problem and to prevent it from happening again.

Contact the owner immediately or headquarters if you are part of a chain. They have a right to know and can help you in making the decisions that will have to be made.

Handwashing Know-How

Just rinsing your hands quickly under running water won't remove the bad bugs that can cause your customers to become ill. The key to success is the friction caused by rubbing your hands together. You can help prevent foodborne illness by using the following handwashing method:



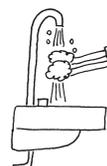
1. Wet hands with warm water



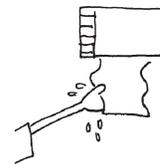
2. Rub hands with soap



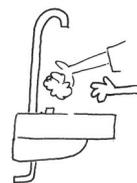
3. Rub hands briskly for 20 seconds, including fingertips and between fingers



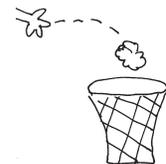
4. Rinse soap from hands



5. Dry hands with a paper towel



6. Use the paper towel to turn off the faucet



7. Throw the used paper towel in the trash (Tip: Before you toss it, use it to open the washroom door.)

Test Yourself on Food Safety

Try this quick test of your food safety knowledge. See if you can find the best answer for all five questions.

1. Foodborne illnesses outbreaks have been traced to *E. coli* in:
 - a. Ground meat.
 - b. Frozen cookie dough.
 - c. Lettuce, spinach and sprouts.
 - d. All of the above.
2. The way to prevent cross contamination in your kitchen is to:
 - a. Separate raw and cooked foods.
 - b. Wash your hands often.
 - c. Clean and sanitize food contact surfaces and utensils.
 - d. All of the above.
3. For best quality, low-acid canned foods should be used within:
 - a. Six months.
 - b. One year.
 - c. Five years.
 - d. None of the above.
4. If you believe a particular cooked food may have made a customer ill, you should:
 - a. Throw out any of the food that remains.
 - b. Cook the remaining food more thoroughly.
 - c. Save the suspect food in case the health department wants to test it, but label it carefully so it does not get used.
 - d. None of the above.
5. After washing your hands, it is a good practice to turn off the faucet using:
 - a. A glove.
 - b. A clean hand.
 - c. A paper towel.
 - d. None of the above.

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

¹ Sources: The Bad Bug Book, 2nd Edition; 2009 FDA model Food Code.



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