

FOOD TALK



SANITATION TIPS FOR FOOD WORKERS

SUMMER 2014



A Troubleshooter's Guide to Safe Summer Food

Foodborne illness spikes every summer. One reason is that bacteria love the warm weather. But there are others. For many foodservice establishments, June to September is the busiest time of the year, so there's extra pressure on management and staff, which can lead to taking shortcuts.

Here are a few examples:

- Leaving food out at room temperature because it's easier to get at;
- Cooking food to less than the required temperature to save time;
- Not checking temperatures;
- Cooling potentially hazardous foods in containers that are too large;
- Not washing hands thoroughly after using the restroom;
- Handling prepared foods with bare hands instead of with tissues, tongs or other utensils.

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There's no secret recipe for keeping food safe in hot, humid summer weather.

And here are some more reasons why summer can be a tricky time for food safety:

- **Inexperienced staff...** Seasonal help or temporary personnel hired to cover staff vacations may not know the essentials of safe food handling, especially handwashing and temperature control.
- **Poor pest controls ...** In warm weather, flies are looking for ways into your establishment so they can feast on the food in your kitchen. Open doors and unscreened windows give them plenty of access. They can become a source of contamination and disease unless you work to keep them out.

- **And there's more ...** The foods you bring into your establishment may be bacterial time bombs, carrying germs or toxins that can make your customers ill unless you take steps to deal with them. So how can you get the upper hand on germs this summer?

Here are some simple ways:

- **Wash your hands thoroughly and often.** Bacteria get around the kitchen mostly by attaching themselves to an object and dropping off when that object comes into contact with another. It's called "cross contamination." The most common cause of cross contamination is dirty hands. If you leave the restroom without properly washing your hands and then fix sandwiches, you could contaminate them all.
- **Cool foods quickly.** A major cause of food poisoning is the failure to cool foods fast. The longer you leave food at room temperature, the greater the risk of bacteria growing to dangerous numbers. Given the right conditions –

warmth is one of them – germs reproduce every twenty minutes. In just half a day, one germ will multiply into billions.

- **Don't touch ready-to-eat foods with bare hands.** Cooking kills most bacteria. But ready-to-eat foods are not heated after you touch them, so customers will consume whatever bacteria you've left on the food. Use utensils or tissues or wear disposable gloves to keep germs from leapfrogging onto the foods you prepare.
- **Check the temperature of everything you serve hot or cold.** Use your thermometer often to make sure the hot foods in the steam table are being held at 135 degrees F (57 degrees C) or above and that the cold foods in the salad bar are held at 41 degrees F (5 degrees C) or below. These are the recommended temperatures in the 2013 FDA Model Food Code. Avoid cross contamination by sanitizing the thermometer between uses.

At Temporary Events



There's no secret recipe for keeping food safe in hot, humid summer weather.

But you need to be extra careful if your foodservice operation moves outdoors, because food spoils quickly if not held at a safe temperature.

* * *

"It's the basics," says Lee Corman, assistant director of food safety in the Florida Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services.

For a start, keep food outside the temperature "danger zone." Foods intended to be eaten cold should be held at or below 41 degrees F (5 degrees C) and food intended to be eaten hot should be at or above 135 degrees F (57 degrees C). These are the recommended temperatures in the 2013 FDA Model Food Code.

Remember this rule when catered food moves

from the preparation site to where it will be served, perhaps to a buffet at an outdoor festival. Two hours is the longest time food should sit on an outdoor buffet. You can use domes to cover items such as platters of potato salad to protect from

Keep food outside the temperature "danger zone."

flies and other insects.

If you are organizing an outdoor event, be sure to register with the local health department, which will send inspectors to check the facilities during the event. One essential will be temporary hand washing stations, with clean, potable water for washing and one for rinsing. You also will need potable water for washing equipment, plus sanitizers for surfaces where food is prepared.



Flies and other insects can be troublesome, not just at summer festivals but also in the outdoor dining area of a restaurant, especially when it's not screened. Be careful to keep closed all doors leading from the restaurant

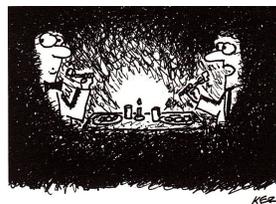
to the outside dining area. And cover plates as you carry them from the kitchen to the customers.

Frequent handwashing is a must for all food workers, including servers and bussers as well as cooks and food preparers. Waiters should wash their hands after removing used plates or cleaning tables. So should bussers.

"Anytime they are cleaning, wiping down tables; anytime hands become soiled, hands need to be washed," says food safety expert David McSwane, executive director of the Conference for Food Protection.

Prevent cross contamination: Don't use the same tools or cutting board for raw meat and raw vegetables. And store raw food away from cooked food.

In Power Outages



What about those power outages caused by summer storms? For short outages, refrigerators and freezers will keep food safe if the doors remain closed. In

longer outages, temporary storage in refrigerator or freezer trucks may help. But if the establishment needs to shut down, you should contact the health department, which will typically inspect the premises before allowing it to reopen.

Ice is food too...

Some people think the cold temperature of ice kills bacteria. But they're wrong. Some bacteria in ice are preserved, not destroyed, so they can wait around until they get a chance to grow.

And because ice is frequently used for cold-holding, it's possible to forget that ice is also a food.

Handling ice with dirty hands or utensils is often a cause of contamination. If someone uses a utensil or ice scoop and returns it to the ice instead of storing the scoop outside the ice bin, contaminants can get into the ice. You need to keep ice for drinks separate from ice used for cooling foods and beverages.

Bacteria and viruses can survive in ice. And, over time, mold can build up inside ice machines and create a dangerous poison.

It takes routine cleaning to keep ice



machines clean. Here are some ways to keep ice safe in your establishment:

- Cleaning ice-making machines once a week.
- Using an ice scoop and storing it outside the ice bin, not in the ice.
- Frequently cleaning and sanitizing utensils used in ice.
- Hanging ice containers upside down to keep them dry and off the floor -- and by not stacking one ice container inside another.
- Cleaning the area around the ice machine using mild soap and water.
- Not storing food containers in the ice.
- Not using containers for holding ice if they are also used for storing food or chemicals.



Help Stop Foodborne Illness... Wash Your Hands!

Test Yourself on Food Safety

Try this quick test of what you learned in this issue of **Food Talk**.

1. Given the right conditions, in just half a day a single germ can multiply into:
 - a. Hundreds
 - B. Thousands.
 - c. Millions.
 - D. Billions
2. Food safety experts advise that ice-making machines should be cleaned:
 - a. When they are visibly moldy.
 - b. At least once a month.
 - c. At least once a week.
 - d. Daily.
3. According to the 2013 FDA Model Food Code, after proper cooking, all foods that are to be held hot must be held at:
 - a. Room temperature until served.
 - b. 49 degrees C (120 degrees F) or above.
 - c. 74 degrees C (165 degrees F) or above.
 - d. 57 degrees C (135 degrees F) or above.

4. According to the 2013 FDA Model Food Code, after proper cooking, all foods that are to be held cold must be:
 - a. Stored at room temperature until served.
 - b. Cooled slowly and held at 10 degrees C (50 degrees F) or below.
 - c. Cooled quickly and held at 5 degrees C (41 degrees F) or below.
 - d. Cooled quickly and held at 7 degrees C (45 degrees F) or below.
5. According to the latest research, the main cause of foodborne illness in food establishments is (Hint: Check your hands):
 - a. Inadequate cooking of foods.
 - b. Cross contamination.
 - c. Improper cooling of foods.
 - d. Poor personal hygiene.

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

Sources for this issue: 2013 FDA Model Food Code

