food MATTERS

No. 5

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This issue of *Food Matters* addresses two common violations found during inspections. We hope that after reading this issue you will be able to prevent these violations. The issue also describes two foodborne disease outbreaks that could have been avoided. For more information, please see the directory on page 4. We will be happy to hear your suggestions for topics to be covered in future issues of *Food Matters*. Call the Health Academy at (212) 280-9211 with your suggestions.

COMMON VIOLATIONS

Violation: Food worker does not wash hands thoroughly after using the toilet, coughing, sneezing, smoking, preparing raw foods or otherwise contaminating hands.

Proper hand washing is the most important barrier against the pathogens that cause foodborne illnesses. This is the one activity we can never perform too often. Many food workers do not wash their hands as often as necessary or use the proper technique. Merely using soap and warm water is not enough. Rubbing the hands together for at least 20 seconds increases the lather created by the soap and loosens dirt which can now be easily flushed away by an adequate flow of warm water.

Many of the germs that cause food borne illnesses are found in our feces and other bodily fluids. It is critical that we wash our hands thoroughly after using the toilet. Also, since fecal and other matter can accumulate under fingernails, special care must be taken to clean them as part of proper hand washing. Attention should be focused not only on the hands and finger nails but also to exposed portions of arms, preferably up to the elbows.

The hands may become contaminated whenever a food worker engages in certain activities. Using the toilet is just one of them. Other such activities include eating; sneezing; smoking; touching hair, beard or other body parts; or handling raw food products. These are by no means the only times when hand washing is required. It is good practice to wash hands prior to starting any food related activity such as working with exposed food, clean utensils and unprotected single service articles.

The use of hand sanitizers, in liquid or gel form, is becoming popular in food service establishments. These substances may be used to reduce the number of microorganisms on the surface of the skin but must not be used as a substitute for proper hand washing. Hands must be washed thoroughly before any sanitizer is applied. It is also important to follow the manufacturer's instructions when using and storing these substances.

ALL EMPLOYEES MUST

WASH HANDS

- after using the toilet
- before handling food
- whenever they are soiled

COMMON VIOLATIONS (CONTINUED)

Violation: Hand-washing facility not provided in or near food preparation area and toilet room. Hot and cold running water at adequate pressure not provided at facility.

In order to encourage frequent hand washing, hand wash sinks must be placed at convenient locations throughout a food service establishment. The Health Code requires that these sinks be placed in food preparation areas, food dispensing areas and in or immediately adjacent to toilet rooms. The rule of thumb is that a hand wash sink should be within easy reach of a food worker.

Each sink must be provided with hot and cold running water, soap and towels. A mixture of hot and cold water will provide water warm enough and comfortable to use. Also warm water is more likely to remove the fatty residues encountered in kitchens and encourage soap and other hand detergents to lather copiously. A good lather and adequate water pressure will quickly flush dirt and soil from the hands. Water that is too hot, however, will discourage workers from washing their hands.

It is important to note that hand washing is not permitted in a food preparation sink since there is the possibility of contaminating the food that would be subsequently washed in that sink. Hand washing is also prohibited in ware washing sinks and slop sinks.

The availability of a hand wash sink, soap and an adequate supply of hot and cold water is no guarantee that food workers will wash their hands. Workers need to understand the benefits of hand washing and be taught how and when to perform this crucial activity. Also, a sign must be placed conspicuously at each hand wash sink to prompt food workers to wash their hands.

FOODBORNE DISEASE OUTBREAKS

As food safety is an important public health concern, the Department of Health continues to investigate reported cases of foodborne disease outbreaks to determine the magnitude and causes of the outbreak.

Following is a brief description of one recently investigated outbreak.

An Outbreak of Salmonella Poisoning:

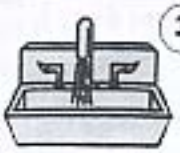
An outbreak of *Salmonella* affected 38 children and three staff members after they ate under-cooked chicken prepared on a grill at a barbecue picnic for a day camp. The chicken was purchased and stored in the refrigerator overnight, transported in a cooler the next morning, and cooked for 45 minutes. The chicken came in many different parts and sizes, and all should have been cooked to a temperature of 165°F. However, the temperature of the chicken was not evaluated and some larger pieces, because of their size and thickness, were not properly cooked even though the smaller pieces were.

This outbreak could have been prevented if a thermometer had been used to determine the internal temperature of the cooked chicken.

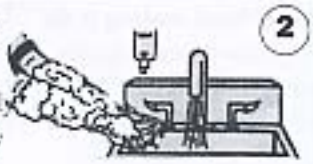
Whether in a food service establishment or at a picnic, chicken must be cooked to 165°F for 15 seconds in order to destroy the *Salmonella* organism that is found naturally on it and other poultry. This temperature has to be determined by a thermometer, not by guessing. Also, keeping chicken and poultry refrigerated or on ice at 41°F prior to cooking will slow multiplication of the *Salmonella* organism.

The Steps of Proper Hand Washing

1. Use hot and cold running water



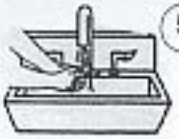
2. Wet hands and apply soap, lather generously up to the elbow



3. Use a brush on the nails

4. Rub hands together for 20 seconds

5. Rinse hands thoroughly



6. Dry hands on disposable paper towels or a hot air dryer

Recommendations to prevent future outbreaks include the following:

- Potentially hazardous foods are to be kept at the required temperatures except during the time required for necessary preparation, which should not exceed two hours.
- Foods which are to be transported for service must be kept hot at 140°F or cold at 41°F until time for serving.
- Food temperatures must be monitored with a thermometer at regular intervals.
- Bare hand contact with ready-to-eat foods must be eliminated.
- Refrigerated potentially hazardous foods must be reheated to 165°F prior to serving.

DROUGHT EMERGENCY: WHAT WE CAN DO.

New York City is now experiencing a Stage 1 Drought Emergency. This means that we are faced with a number of mandatory restrictions in our use of water. As concerned citizens we must use every means at our disposal for conserving water.

Food Service Establishments require an adequate supply of hot and cold running water to prepare and serve food safely but you also have a civic responsibility to conserve water as much as possible.

Water should not be served to patrons unless requested. As operators of these businesses, there are many ways in which you can help. The following are but a few ways in which you can contribute to this citywide effort.

- Repair leaky faucets and turn taps off tightly.
- Run the dishwasher only when you have a full load of dishes.
- During the all-important activity of hand washing, turn the faucet off while lathering, rubbing the hands together and brushing the finger nails.
- Thawing frozen foods requires copious amounts of cold running water. However this step in food preparation can also be done in a refrigerator: all it takes is some planning. Also, frozen products that are to be cooked immediately may be thawed in a microwave oven.

Every food service establishment can save hundreds of gallons of water by being careful and following the above steps.

LET US LEARN FROM THE MISTAKES MADE BY OTHERS.

During last year, an outbreak of Hepatitis A was traced to a restaurant on the West Coast. An investigation by the local health department revealed that the source of the infection was a food worker who was working while he had a severe case of diarrhea. Four customers tested positive for Hepatitis A and sued the restaurant. Each customer received between $25,000 and $75,000 to settle their law suit. The restaurant lost plenty of money and had a lot of bad publicity.

This could have been avoided if the following measures had been taken:

- Any food worker ill with diarrhea or a disease communicable through food must be excluded from a food service establishment.
- Any ready-to-eat foods such as salads and sandwiches must be handled with the aid of utensils such as gloves, tongs and deli paper. The use of bare hands is strictly prohibited with these foods.
- All food workers must wash their hands after using the restroom, before handling food and every time their hands are contaminated.

Source: *Food Protection Report*, March 2001.

DID YOU KNOW?

Cigarette vending machines are prohibited in all public places including all food service establishments. The only exception to this regulation, Local Law 67, is taverns. A tavern is an establishment where primarily alcoholic beverages are sold for consumption on the premises. Food, if sold, is incidental to the sale of alcoholic beverages and accounts for less than 40% of gross annual sales.

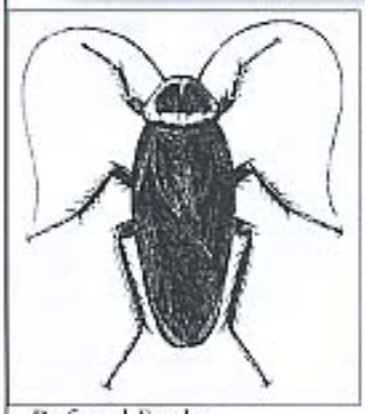
A tobacco vending machine, when located in a tavern, has to be there under the following conditions:

- It must be placed at least 25 feet away from any entrance to the premises.
- It must be directly visible to the owner or an employee of the establishment.
- A sign must be affixed to it identifying the wholesale or retail dealer's cigarette licence number and expiration date, place of business and telephone number.
- A sign in red lettering on a white card must be posted. This sign should state that the sale of cigarettes to minors is prohibited.

Sale of cigarettes, cigars, chewing tobacco, powdered tobacco, bidis, herbal cigarettes, or other tobacco products, rolling papers or pipes to persons under 18 years of age is

PROHIBITED BY LAW.

WANTED: FOR CONTAMINATING HUMAN FOOD ...



Preferred Foods:

Foods high in protein and moisture, but will eat anything, including grease, fingernail trimmings and dead insects. Needs only a drop of water a day.

Signs of Infestation:

Egg cases (look like mouse droppings) and dead and live roaches.

To prevent harboring this vermin:

- Check deliveries for roaches and/or egg cases.
- Seal all crevices that are 1/16 of an inch wide or larger. These collect debris and serve as breeding places.
- Clean up all spilled food and grease.
- Repair any leaky plumbing or sources of condensation.

To Capture this Outlaw:

- Sticky traps and glue boards are very effective for monitoring and for controlling small infestations. Do not place in very dusty and hot locations.
- Poison baits are only attractive to roaches if other food sources are not available.
- If pesticide sprays are used, verify that they are approved for use in commercial food establishments. Follow all label instructions carefully.

Source: FOOD TALK Winter 2000

A professional exterminator can help to control cockroaches. Remember State Law requires that every commercial pesticide applicator, including persons retained by food service establishments, be certified by the State Department of Environmental Conservation, and hold a currently valid certification card.

MOVED

The Administrative Tribunal has moved to a new location.

This office is now located at: The City of New York Manhattan Business Center, 66 John Street, 11th Floor, New York, NY 10038.

The hours of operation are 9am to 5pm., and the telephone number is (212) 361- 1000

If you have questions or comments regarding this newsletter, please call the Bureau of Inspections or the Health Academy. The telephone numbers are listed below.

If you wish to contact:

ADMINISTRATIVE TRIBUNAL
66 John Street, 11th floor,
NY, NY 10038
☎ (212) 361-1000

BUREAU OF INSPECTIONS
253 Broadway, 12th floor,
Box CN59A, NY, NY 10007
☎ (212) 676-1600

CITYWIDE LICENSING CENTER
42 Broadway, 5th floor,
NY, NY 10004
☎ (212) 487-4436

HEALTH ACADEMY
160 West 100th Street,
NY, NY 10025
☎ (212) 280-9211

INSPECTOR GENERAL
80 Maiden Lane,
NY, NY 10005
☎ (212) 825-2141

NYC DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH
160 WEST 100 STREET, RM. 189
NEW YORK, NY 10025

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