

SERVING SAFE FOOD©

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What ever happened to Caesar salads and steak tartar being done from scratch at the table? Also, where did all those one-half pound rare hamburgers and stuffed turkeys go?

Twenty-five years ago when I started working in a country club kitchen, it didn't seem that there were so many food safety concerns. Did we do a better job then? Were we just lucky? Or perhaps, we just didn't know what made someone ill?

Nowadays, it seems everyone does extensive training for their executive staff, but what is being done for the entry level cook or dishwasher? Are these employees even around for their 2nd paycheck? Are they aware of the proper cleaning, preparation and cooking procedures? Are they familiar with the food products we are using or are these items totally foreign to them?

This article is part of a series addressing safe food service procedures and will share the principles of the ServSafe® Essentials Program as developed by the National Restaurant Association Education Foundation.

FOODBORNE ILLNESS

Definition: A disease transmitted or carried to people by food.

The Center of Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) [<http://www.cdc.gov>] defines an outbreak of a foodborne illness as an incident where 2 or more people experience the same illness after eating the same food. The illness is confirmed when the specific food is shown by laboratory analysis to be the source of the illness.

There are 40,000 cases of Salmonellosis (Salmonella poisoning) reported annually in the United States. The CDC estimates that the actual number of cases could be twenty plus times greater. 1000 deaths annually are attributable to Salmonellosis. It's interesting to note that laboratory analysis is used to confirm the outbreak because if 2 or more people don't present a fecal sample, there can not be a confirmed outbreak.

What are the most common causes of reported foodborne illnesses?

Failure to properly cool food

Failure to cook and hold food product at the proper temperatures

Poor personal hygiene

YOPI – Young, Old, Pregnant, Immuno-compromised

These are the groups most at risk to contract a foodborne illness. They either haven't had time for their immune systems to develop adequate defenses or they have weakened defenses.

HOW TO PREVENT FOODBORNE ILLNESSES

You can commence by developing a food safety program such as Hazard Analysis Critical Control Points (HACCP) where you identify the food(s) at risk and the processes that the food travels from receiving to consumption. When you commence doing this also consider your clientele (YOPI), how the food can become contaminated and the types of food you serve.

There are certain foods that must be considered potentially hazardous since it has a history of causing foodborne outbreaks. When one looks at the following list, it seems that everything we eat can be included: Meat, poultry, shellfish, crustaceans, eggs, milk, cooked rice, baked potatoes, tofu, sprouts, sliced melon and the list goes on...

OTHER HAZARDS TO CONSIDER

BIOLOGICAL – include bacteria, parasites and fungi

CHEMICAL –include food additives, pesticides, cleaning supplies and preservatives

PHYSICAL –include those unwanted items found in food: hair, bandages, metal staples, glass...

GOOD FOOD SAFETY PRACTICES

A great adage that can be applied to your operation is:

The Staff Doesn't Do What You Expect; They Do What You Inspect!

A good way to start would be to issue baby doll thermometers to all the cooks and pantry persons and then on a regular basis ask them what temperature the _____ is at?

Noted earlier were the 3 most common causes of foodborne illnesses.

Two of these: failure to properly cool food and failure to cook and hold food product at the proper temperatures are considered time and temperature abuse.

The 3rd - Poor personal hygiene means ensuring your employees wash their hands after visiting the washroom, don't cough/sneeze near food and don't touch any sores or cuts while preparing and /or serving food.

Another factor you have to consider is preventing cross contamination.

Have employees:

- Wash their hands after handling any raw product.
- Wear plastic gloves when working with any product that will not receive any cooking.
- Clean and sanitize their workstations when completing the present process.

- Wear a clean and sanitary uniform.

The best way to start a program is to take the first step! Ask yourself the following questions:

- How well are you doing to provide safe food in the Dining Room? At the Pool? On the Golf Course?
- Has your staff received ServSafe® Training?
- Have you started developing a HACCP Program?
- Does the Health Department always give you a 100% rating when they visit?

One other consideration I would like to share with you. I recently read the article regarding the food safety practices in our homes. Families in Logan, Utah who thought they were doing a good job of food safety allowed scientists to place cameras in their kitchens.

Some of the occurrences were not using soap to wash hands; using the same towel to wipe up meat juices then dry one's hands; undercooking meatloaf; not washing the lettuce prior to making a salad and tasting a bacteria ridden marinade. I thought the biggest gaff was the mother who reportedly handled raw chicken and then without washing her hands, prepared her baby's bottle.

Those of us in the food industry have a definite advantage over the average home cook as we have received a lot of additional education. And this prompts my last thought: Don't you think it would be a great idea to purchase a ServSafe® Essentials training manual for your spouse? A friend of mine recently did!