

Food *for thought*

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A newsletter for Fairfax County food establishment owners and operators and their employees

Prevent Cross-Contamination: Prevent Foodborne Illness

Cross-contamination occurs when germs are passed from one place to another. Cross-contamination is one way to spread foodborne germs. Food establishment operators must be aware of the causes of cross-contamination during food preparation and take steps to train employees to recognize the importance of *preventing* cross-contamination.



Keeping equipment clean and safe from cross-contamination is a never-ending challenge in food establishments. Here are some helpful hints and questions to ask yourself:

- Use a sanitizer solution to wipe down equipment surfaces during use.
- Use a test kit to make sure the

concentration of sanitizer is at the correct level.

- Do employees know that they should be wiping down prep tables with a sanitizer solution throughout the day?
- Do not use the same cutting board or prep table surface for preparing raw chicken and vegetables. Raw chicken can easily contaminate a cutting board or prep surface. Use two *separate* cutting boards when preparing poultry, meat or fish, and raw vegetables. If there is only one cutting board, wash and sanitize that cutting board between uses.
- The actions of a food handler can also lead to cross-contamination. When handling raw poultry, meat, fish or shellfish, employees should wear *single-use* gloves. Single-use gloves are used for a single activity such as cutting raw chicken. When an employee finishes the job requiring single-use gloves, the gloves must be discarded and new gloves used for the next food handling task. Wash hands when changing gloves!

Potentially hazardous foods—meat, poultry, seafood, shellfish—may contain germs such as *E. coli* or *Salmonella*. Improper storage of these items may lead to juices from one raw food dripping onto other raw or ready-to-eat foods in the refrigerator.

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Food Safety Reminders

- Wash hands often!
- Don't handle ready-to-eat foods with bare hands.
- Report symptoms of foodborne illness to management.
- Food must come from an approved source.
- Cook foods to proper temperatures.
- Use a food thermometer!
- Keep hot foods **HOT** — above 135°F.
- Keep cold foods **COLD** — below 41°F.
- Keep foods out of the **Danger Zone** (41°F - 135°F).
- Wash, rinse and sanitize food-contact surfaces regularly.
- Wash hands often!

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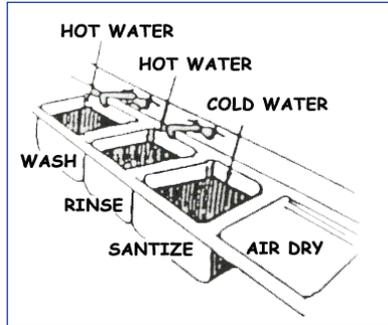
Stay Connected!



Wash, Rinse & Sanitize!

One of the most important steps in preventing the spread of foodborne illness is to wash, rinse and sanitize food-contact equipment, utensils and preparation surfaces regularly. This requires a three-compartment sink. Each compartment (or sink) has a purpose.

1. The wash sink is used to hold the soap solution and hot water and to clean the dirt and particles left after being used.
2. The rinse sink is always the middle sink—filled with clean hot water.
3. Washed utensils are sanitized in the sanitize sink. Sanitizing is necessary to reduce the number of germs on the surfaces that were washed. The water in the sanitizing sink does not need to be hot. To be sanitized correctly, a washed item should be dipped in the sanitizing solution for a minimum of ten seconds.



The final step to the wash process is air drying. It is best to let utensils air dry completely before storing on the shelves because hand-drying increases the risk of re-contaminating the cleaned utensils.

The two chemicals most often used in restaurants for making sanitizing solutions are chlorine (bleach) and quaternary ammonia (quat). These chemicals must be used in specific amounts and never mixed. A test kit is required to test correctly for the chemical being used. A chlorine sanitizing solution must be between 50 and 100 part per million (ppm) chlorine. Quat has a range of acceptable concentrations; use the product according to the manufacturer's recommendations.

In addition to setting up the sanitize sink every morning as part of opening for business, a sanitizer bucket should be prepared and placed in the food prep area. All surfaces which come in contact with food, such as cutting boards and prep tables should be regularly wiped down with sanitizer solution to kill germs and prevent cross-contamination. If you have questions about this process, talk to your area inspector for more details about setting up the three-compartment sink and sanitizer buckets.

Food Recalls

Periodically, there will be a recall of a food product by the manufacturer. The recall notice will describe the steps to take if you have a recalled product in your inventory. The main thing to remember is that a recalled food product may not be used in food preparation for your customers. You can get more information about food recalls by visiting www.fairfaxcounty.gov/hd/food or www.foodsafety.gov. The Health Department recommends that you check for recall updates weekly or sign up for automated alerts that are emailed directly to you.

Prevent Foodborne Illness

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A good storage method is to store foods from top to bottom by their *cook temperature*. The *higher* the cook temperature, the *lower* the food should be stored in the refrigerator:

1. Cooked left-overs should be stored on the top shelf;
2. Raw foods such as produce should be stored below the leftovers;
3. Next would be fish and pork;
4. On the fourth shelf would be ground beef; and
5. Always on the bottom shelf is the poultry.



Storing food properly is important for a number of reasons. Consider this example: Chicken is cooked at the highest cook temperature (165°F) in order to kill *Salmonella* which may be in the chicken. If the chicken was stored above the fish and juices dripped on the fish, someone could become ill because fish is cooked to 145°F, which is not the temperature that kills *Salmonella*. So remember, store poultry on the bottom shelf to prevent cross-contamination from juice drippings. If space is limited, store the raw foods in closed containers to prevent dripping juices. A storage chart with an example of how to store foods properly in a commercial refrigerator is available in multiple languages from the area Health Department representative or online at www.fairfaxcounty.gov/hd/food/foodtrain.htm.

Voluntary Closures

On a day to day basis, the restaurant operator does his/her best to reduce the risk of foodborne illness in the food establishment. However, it may be necessary for the operator to voluntarily close the establishment due to an imminent health hazard. An imminent health hazard may exist because of an emergency such as fire, flood, extended electrical outage, sewage backup, misuse of poisonous or toxic materials, onset of an apparent foodborne illness outbreak, gross unsanitary conditions such as roach or rodent infestations, or other circumstances that may endanger public health (such as inadequate refrigeration). If an imminent health hazard exists, the Fairfax County Food Code states that "...a permit holder shall immediately discontinue operations and notify the regulatory authority..." When an inspector is not on the premises, it is the operator's responsibility to do the right thing and close the food establishment and call the health department. An inspection must be made by the health department before the food establishment may re-open.

If you have any questions about imminent health hazards and voluntary closures, please contact the health department at 703-246-2444.