What is a Risk Factor?

When talking about food safety, the most important topic is the prevention of foodborne illness - Job #1 in any restaurant is to prevent foodborne illness. According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) there are five risk factors that lead to foodborne illness in a restaurant. This CDC reached this conclusion by analyzing the causes of foodborne illness outbreaks over a period of years. To reduce the occurrence of foodborne illness, food safety training that includes steps on reducing the five risk factors must be provided to restaurant employees.

1. **Unsafe Food Source**
   Buy food from an approved source. All foods that are prepared for sale to the public must be bought from a safe, regulated source, such as local grocery stores or permitted distributors. Foods may not be prepared at home.

2. **Time and temperature abuse**
   To prevent foodborne illness, some foods must be controlled for time and temperature (TCS foods). When food is not kept at the right temperature, either hot or cold, this is referred to as “time and temperature abuse.” Hot holding, cold holding, cooling, thawing and reheating can all lead to time and temperature abuse if done incorrectly. It is important to train employees about the Danger Zone - temperatures between 41°F and 135°F. The longer food is in the Danger Zone, the more chance bacteria can grow and foodborne illness can result.

3. **Inadequate Cook Temperature**
   An inadequate cook temperature can also lead to foodborne illness. Cook to the proper temperature to kill the bacteria in raw foods. Use a food thermometer to measure the internal temperature of cooked foods. Do not judge doneness by how the food looks!

4. **Contaminated Equipment**
   The fourth risk factor is contaminated equipment. Keeping equipment clean and safe from cross-contamination is a never-ending challenge in food establishments. Do not use the same cutting board?

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**Proper Use of Gloves**

Bare-hand contact with ready-to-eat foods can be a contributing factor to the risk of a foodborne illness. The use of single-use, disposable gloves is one way of preventing bare-hand contact. It is also a good practice for employees to use disposable gloves when handling raw foods such as ground beef and chicken. Proper use of gloves and proper changing of gloves can be a big help in preventing cross-contamination.

An employee should limit their work to a single task that requires wearing gloves such as preparing sandwiches or preparing salads. Gloves become contaminated just like bare hands; when changing tasks, employees should change their gloves as well. Do not wash gloves! When changing gloves, employees should also wash their hands before putting on the clean gloves because hands and clean gloves can become contaminated while removing the used pair of gloves.

With proper glove use and, particularly the proper changing of gloves, the risk of foodborne illness through cross-contamination can be reduced. Are you doing your part?
for raw chicken and vegetables. Do wash, rinse and sanitize all prep equipment between uses. Change gloves when going from one task to another.

5. **Poor Personal Hygiene**
   
   Good personal hygiene includes wearing clean clothes/aprons, keeping fingernails trimmed, wearing hats or hair nets to cover hair; and washing hands often! Hands can be a source of contamination leading to foodborne illness. Handling ready-to-eat foods with bare hands is a sure way to pass on a foodborne illness if an employee is ill. Handwashing is the most important thing you can do to prevent the spread of germs which can lead to foodborne illness. Employees should wash their hands after using the restroom; before and after preparing food; after handling raw meat and poultry; after handling unclean utensils or equipment; when changing gloves; when changing tasks; after eating and drinking; and after smoking.

Many Health Department inspections are risk factor assessments. During these inspections, the inspector reviews the active managerial control methods the food establishment uses to reduce the occurrence of risk factors. Temperatures are taken of hot and cold foods. Cook temperatures are taken. It is observed whether employees are washing their hands when they should. Cleaning and sanitizing procedures are observed. If necessary, your inspector may give guidance on how to reduce the occurrence of the risk factors in your establishment.

By taking the necessary steps, a restaurant can reduce the likelihood of a foodborne illness outbreak and keep the customer truly satisfied at the same time! For more information on food safety in food service establishments, visit our webpage at www.fairfaxcounty.gov/hd/food.

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### Active Managerial Control Awardees Recognized

Congratulations to the following operators who were recognized with Active Managerial Control awards! During a recent inspection there were no violations cited and it was observed that good active managerial controls were in place:

- **Marc Wilson**, Tower Club, Vienna
- **Rob Cochrane & Evan Buchholz**, Wegmans Food Market, Alexandria
- **Nicole Asher & Carlos Vasquez**, Bonefish Grill, Centreville

See pictures and read details about how they are reducing the risk of foodborne illness in their food establishments on the Health Department website, [http://www.fairfaxcounty.gov/hd/food/amc-program.htm](http://www.fairfaxcounty.gov/hd/food/amc-program.htm). If you have questions about active managerial control in your food establishment, please speak to your area inspector.

### Keep Those Shellstock Tags!

Restaurants often serve raw molluscan shellfish, such as oysters, clams and mussels, which are harvested from various rivers and bays. Before harvesting is allowed, the waters of the rivers and bays must be certified by state and federal regulators as safe (uncontaminated). If the waters of the bay or river become contaminated, shellstock may contain harmful bacteria or viruses which can lead to foodborne illness. Food service establishments play an ongoing, behind the scenes, role in monitoring the shellstock source through shellstock tags.

Food service operators have two primary responsibilities regarding shellstock tags:

1. **The tags must be kept with the original container until the container is empty.** The Food Code requires that when the original container becomes empty, food service operators note the date on the tag.

2. **KEEP TAGS from empty containers for 90 days.** Fairfax County Food Code requires shellstock tags be kept for 90 days after the container is empty. Containers may include cardboard boxes, bags or cans.

The shellstock tags identify the waters from which the shellfish came, when the shellfish was harvested, who harvested the shellfish and who distributed the shellfish—among other information. This is important information that can be used to trace back to the harvest areas if a food-related illness occurs related to contaminated shellfish. If the trace back leads back to contaminated waters, that area may be declared off limits to further shellstock harvesting.

If shellfish is served raw, the health department inspector will verify that there is a record-keeping method for shellstock tags. It can be as simple as an index card box or a hook in an office, so long as the record keeping is orderly. If a food service operator is not keeping records or incomplete records are observed by an inspector, the product is subject to impoundment and/or disposal.

If you have any questions about shellstock tags or recordkeeping methods, please check with your area inspector.