Food for Thought

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Volume 1 Issue 3
January 2010

Prevent Cross-Contamination: Prevent Foodborne Illness

When germs are passed from one place to another, this is called cross-contamination. 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 then 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. 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 use. 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. 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. Cooked leftovers would be stored on the top shelf. Raw foods such as produce would be stored below the leftovers. Next would be fish and pork. On the fourth shelf would be ground beef. Always on the bottom shelf is the poultry. 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 (Page 2)

Food Safety Reminders:

- **Prevent Cross Contamination!**
- **Sanitize surfaces between uses.**
- **Use separate cutting boards for meats and vegetables.**
- **Use single-use gloves, tongs or deli paper to handle ready to eat foods.**
- **Prevent drippage!**
- **Always store raw meats below other raw or ready-to-eat foods.**

When Is It Done?

* **Hot hold (after cooking) - 135°F**
* **Leftovers (reheat) - 165°F**
* **Pork - 145°F**
* **Fish - 145°F**
* **Ground beef - 155°F**
* **Chicken - 165°F**

Food for Thought is Available by Email

If you would like to receive the quarterly newsletter by email, please send a request to *HDfoodsafety@fairfaxcounty.gov*. Please put "Email List" in the subject line and include the name of your food establishment along with the email address.

to 145°F, which is not the temperature that kills *Salmonella*. Store poultry on the bottom shelf to prevent cross-contamination from juice drippings. If space is a problem, 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 http://www.fairfaxcounty.gov/hd/food/foodtrain.htm.

What to do in an electrical outage

In the event of a power outage, the establishment should voluntarily close. Contact the Health Department at 703-246-2444 to let them know of the closure.

An electrical power outage will affect the safe storage of refrigerated and frozen foods. Perishable food such as meat, poultry, seafood, milk and eggs that are not kept properly refrigerated or frozen may cause illness if eaten. In order to protect these foods from spoiling, follow the guidelines listed below

Keep a digital dial, or instant-read thermometer inside refrigerators and freezers to accurately monitor the temperatures until the power returns.

Refrigerator and freezer doors must be kept closed as much as possible to maintain the cold temperature. The refrigerator will keep foods cold for 2-4 hours if it is unopened. Full freezers will hold the temperature for about 48 hours (1/2 full, 12 hours) if the door remains closed. These times may vary depending on age of the unit, temperature setting and amount of food.

Foods that are above 41°F for more than 2 hours must be discarded. *Don't trust your sense of smell. Food may be unsafe even if it doesn't smell bad.*

Thawed food may be used **if it is still below 41°F** or it may be re-frozen if it still contains ice crystals or is below 41°F. Partial thawing and refreezing may reduce the quality of some food, but the food will remain safe.

Follow the **Golden Rule** of food safety, ***"When in Doubt, Throw it Out"***, for any foods that you are not sure have stayed at a safe temperature.

When the electricity comes back on, contact the Health Department to let them know that the establishment has re-opened.

Smoking Ban in Effect December 1, 2009

A new law went into effect on December 1, 2009 to protect restaurant workers and patrons from the harmful effects of second hand smoke. The new legislation prohibits smoking in restaurants that are open to the public. However, smoking may be permitted in food establishments under certain conditions. More information is available at 703-246-2510 or *www.fairfaxcounty.gov/hd/food*.

Kitchen Corner Quiz

1. What are some ways to prevent cross-contamination?
   - A. Sanitize food prep surfaces between use.
   - B. Use separate cutting boards for poultry and vegetable preparation.
   - C. Store raw poultry below all other raw and ready-to-eat foods in the refrigerator.
   - D. All of the above.
2. A good storage method is:
   - A. The higher the cook temperature, the lower the food is stored in the refrigerator.
   - B. Heaviest pans on the bottom shelf.
   - C. The most used foods stored on the easiest to reach shelf.
3. If the electricity goes out in an restaurant it is important that:
   - A. All customers get served as quickly as possible.
   - B. Food in refrigerators and freezers be monitored to make sure it stays below 41F.
   - C. Flashlights are available to help with food preparation.

Answers: 1.D, 2.A, 3. B,

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