Food for Thought

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It's Summertime!

Summertime presents some special challenges to food service operators. The temperature outside goes up and often the temperature in the kitchen goes up. This can put a strain on the refrigeration units in the kitchen. Most refrigerators are designed to run best at temperatures NOT above 85°F. In an effort to cool the kitchen down, back doors are propped open, allowing flies and other unwanted pests into the food prep areas. In extreme instances, the food prep process is moved outside! Frozen food may not be stocked quickly after delivery and, because of the higher temperatures, thawing may begin on the kitchen floor. Does any of this go on in your kitchen?

Some precautions to take to minimize the effect of the summer heat are:

1. Have the refrigerator and freezer units serviced ahead of the summer season. It is doubtful that a refrigerator set to 41°F two hours before opening will keep that same temperature during the busy lunch rush. Set internal temperatures to be 35°-37°F when refrigeration units are not in use. Check this temperature very first thing in the morning. If the units are properly set, they should maintain 41°F even during the busy times of business.
2. Refrigeration units under and across from the cookline are of special concern because they typically work harder to maintain the proper cold temperature (41°F). All refrigerators must have a built-in temperature gauge or an internal thermometer. Check temperatures throughout the day. If food temperatures are going up, adjust the refrigerator temperature or move the food to a refrigerator that will keep the proper temperature.
3. If the back door is opened to let in cooler air, a screen door must be installed to keep flies and other pests out. The screen door must be self-closing and it must fit tightly in the door frame. If there is visible light from around or under the door, the gaps must be sealed.
4. Increase pest control services if an increase in flies or other pests is noticed. Pest control must be provided by a licensed contractor only. Help keep pests - rodents, birds, flies - away by keeping dumpster lids closed.
5. Food preparation may only be done inside the kitchen. There is no reason for food preparation to be done outside.
6. When food is delivered, get it refrigerated quickly. The longer it sits out of refrigeration, the more the food may be in the temperature Danger Zone (41°F -135°F). In the Danger Zone, foodborne bacteria can grow quickly and possibly make people sick. (Next page)

Food Safety Reminders

- **Wash Hands Often!**
- **Keep foods out of the *Danger Zone*.**
- **Keep potentially hazardous foods refrigerated at 41°F or less.**
- **Don't handle ready to eat foods with bare hands.**
- **Use single-use gloves, tongs or deli paper to handle ready to eat foods.**
- **Prevent cross contamination.**
- **Use separate cutting boards for meats and vegetables.**
- **Always store raw meats below other raw or ready-to-eat foods.**
- **Wash Hands Often!**

Permit Fee Increase

Effective July 1, 2010, the Virginia Department of Health implemented a fee increase for the Permit to Operate a Food Establishment. The permit fee is now $285 and will be applied to all new and renewed permits. A complete fee schedule is available at www.fairfaxcounty.gov/hd/food. If you have any questions, please call 703-246-2444.

Proper refrigeration and temperature control of foods is very important in reducing the risk of foodborne illness. Take a look at the food safety practices in your kitchen during the summer months to see if you are doing everything you can to keep food properly cooled and out of the Danger Zone.

Sliced Tomatoes are Potentially Hazardous Foods

Effective with the FDA 2005 Food Code, sliced tomatoes are considered to be a potentially hazardous food. When sliced, diced, or chopped, fresh tomatoes must be handled like other foods requiring temperature control for safety. This includes products using fresh cut tomatoes that are not subsequently cooked, such as pico de gallo.

As a temperature controlled food, fresh tomatoes which have been sliced, diced, or chopped must be stored at 41°F or less. Once prepared, the tomatoes must also be cooled from room temperature to 41F or less within 4 hours after they are sliced, diced, or chopped.

Ask your Health Department representative about recommendations practical to your operation to help you meet this requirement.

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 a very good means 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. Wash hands with soap and water before putting on clean gloves.

While wearing gloves an employee should be limited to a single task requiring the glove use. Gloves become contaminated just like bare hands. When changing tasks, gloves should be removed and changed if necessary. Do not wash gloves! When gloves are changed, hands must be washed before putting on the clean gloves. There is the potential for contaminating hands and clean gloves while removing the used pair of gloves. With proper glove use and, particularly, proper changing of gloves, the risk of foodborne illness through cross-contamination can be reduced. Are you doing your part?

Baseline Survey Is Coming

Between July 1 and December 31, 2010 the Health Department will be conducting a baseline survey as part of a five-year program assessment. A random sampling of food service establishments will be inspected. The information gathered will be used to assess the effectiveness of the Fairfax County Food Safety Program in limiting the risk factors associated with foodborne illness outbreaks. Based on the survey results, inspections, training, and outreach programs will be modified to address the most prevalent risk factors. Please call 703-246-2444 with questions.

Translations Now Available on County Website

Access to all pages of the Fairfax County website are now available in up to twelve languages. This includes the Food Safety web pages! Go to the link at the bottom of www.fairfaxcounty.gov/hd/food and check it out!

Kitchen Corner Quiz

True or **False** (answers below)

1. If it is really hot in the kitchen, it is okay to chop salad lettuce outside where it is cooler.
2. Going into the hot summer season, it is a good idea to have refrigerators serviced to assure that they run properly when the temperature in the kitchen could go up.
3. The Danger Zone is the temperature range where foodborne bacteria grow best.
4. When tomatoes are sliced or diced they must be kept under temperature control just like any other potentially hazardous food.
5. If I wear gloves, there is no need to change them. My hands aren't contaminating anything.
6. There is no need to wash my hands when changing gloves. My hands aren't dirty.

Answers 1.F; 2.T; 3. T; 4.T;, 5. F; 6. F.

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