Food for Thought

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Food Safety Reminders

- **Wash Hands Often!**
- **Keep potentially hazardous foods refrigerated at 41°F or less.**
- ***Listeria* grows in cold temperatures.**
- **Date mark leftover prepared foods.**
- **Date mark leftover commercial packages of potentially hazardous food**
- **Date marking allows 7 days of refrigerator storage.**
- **Day 1 starts the day the food is prepared or the commercial package is opened.**
- **Date marked food must be discarded if not used by the date mark.**
- **Freezing stops the date mark clock - see article.**

What *is* Date Marking?

Keeping foods cold – below 41°F – is one way to keep foodborne germs from multiplying and making people sick. However, there is at least one foodborne bacteria, *Listeria Monocytogenes*, which grows at the lower temperatures found in most refrigerators. It has been found that after seven days at 41°F or less, *Listeria* will multiply, causing food contamination and leading to foodborne illness. *Listeria* is especially dangerous for pregnant women, the very young and the elderly.

Date marking is an identification system required by the Food Code for ready-to-eat foods held over 24 hours so you know how old they are. The system helps identify when food is to be discarded. This requirement is largely based on the ability of *Listeria* to grow in refrigerators. Ready-to-eat potentially hazardous food that is prepared in the food facility and held under refrigeration below 41°F for more than 24 hours must be date marked. The food must be marked with the date of preparation and must be discarded if not consumed **within 7 calendar days** from the date of preparation. In addition, commercially prepared ready-to-eat potentially hazardous food that is prepared and packaged by a food processing plant and held under refrigeration below 41°F must be date marked to indicate the date by which the food must be consumed or discarded - **within 7 calendar days** from the date the original package is opened.

What foods need to be date marked?

If you answer YES to all five questions below, then the food needs to be date marked.

1) Does the food require refrigeration?
2) If commercially packaged, has the original package been opened?
3) Is the food ready-to-eat? Could this food be eaten just like it is, regardless of temperature? Ready-to-eat foods include cold, cooked roast beef, boiled eggs and cold, cooked macaroni.
4) Is the food potentially hazardous? Will it grow bacteria?
5) Will the food be kept for longer than 24 hours?

Date marking must be used even if the foods already have an expiration date on them . The expiration date on a packaged food is a manufacturer's food quality date. Date marking is a *food safety* date. The "use by date" may be written on the (Page 2)

Baseline Survey Continues

As a requirement of the FDA Food Safety Program standards, from July 1 to December 31, 2010 the Health Department will be conducting a survey in about 10% of the food establishments to assess how well the risky behaviors that cause foodborne illness are under control. 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.

package or container; a sticker system or other method may be used to tell people when the food must be eaten or sold. If the food is not used within seven days, it must be discarded.

If the food will not be used within seven days, it may also be placed in a freezer. Freezing food stops the date marking clock but does not reset it. So, if a food is stored at 41°F for 2 days and then frozen, it can still be stored at 41°F for 5 more days when it begins to thaw. The freezing date and the thawing date need to be put on the container along with the prep date, or an indication of how many of the original 7 days have been used.

The following exceptions do not need to be date marked:

1) uncut portions of cured meats packaged in cellulose such as salami and bologna;

2) hard cheeses such as Asiago old, Cheddar, Gruyere, Parmesan, Romano and Sapsago;

3) semi-soft cheeses such as Asiago fresh, Blue, Brick, Colby, Edam, Gouda, Monterey, pasteurized cheeses, Provolone and Swiss;

4) commercial acidified dressings like mayonnaise and Thousand Island.

Soft cheeses like Brie, Camembert, Cottage, Ricotta and Teleme **must** be date marked. *Listeria monocytogenes* is associated with soft cheeses.

Keep *Listeria* from causing foodborne illness. You mustdate mark all food that will be refrigerated for more than 24 hours. For more information, please call 703-246-2444 or ask your field inspector for more details.

Temporary Events

Sometimes a restaurant is invited to sell food at a temporary event – fair, carnival, specialty show. All food vendors must have a temporary food permit for the time that the event is running. This includes restaurants that have a current Fairfax County Permit to Operate. An application for the Permit to Operate a Temporary Food Establishment must be submitted at least 10 days before the event. An inspection will be conducted to approve the food stand for the permit to operate. The temporary event information packet, applications, and a vendor checklist can be found online at www.fairfaxcounty.gov/hd/food. If you are not sure if you need a permit or if you have questions about the requirements, please call the Health Department at 703-246-2444 and ask to speak with the Temporary Event Coordinator.

National Food Safety Education Month®
National Restaurant Association Educational Foundation

NFSEM Wrap-Up

Every year millions of people get sick from food because their immune system does not work correctly. These people are referred to as high-risk because they get sick more easily from food than other people. September was **National Food Safety Education Month**. This year's theme was *High-Risk Customers: Serve Your Fare With Care.* The idea was to create awareness within the food service industry of the serious impact of foodborne illness on high-risk customers. Looking at a customer will not tell you if they are high-risk. The only answer is to train all your staff to practice food safety on a daily basis and reduce the risk for all customers. The educational information from NFSEM is available at *www.servsafe.com/nfsem*.

Did You Know?

All Fairfax County, Fairfax City and City of Falls Church food service establishment inspections are posted on the Virginia Department of Health website at www.healthspace.ca/vdh and can be read by the general public.

Kitchen Corner Quiz

True or **False** (answers below)

1. There are no foodborne germs which can survive in a refrigerator at 41°F or less.
2. Leftovers may be kept in the refrigerator indefinitely.
3. Date marking is required by the Food Code when leftovers are kept in the refrigerator for more than 24 hours.
4. Date marking tells a person when the food must be eaten, sold or discarded.
5. Date marking allows a total of 7 days of refrigeration.
6. If a restaurant makes chicken salad on October 1, the "use by date" would be October 8.
7. When counting the days for date marking, the date of preparation or the date of opening the package is day 1.

Answers: 1. F; 2. F; 3. T; 4. T; 5. T; 6. F; 7. T

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