Food for Thought

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Do You Have an Employee Health Policy?

Food safety equals the prevention of foodborne illness. With that in mind, all food service establishments should have an Employee Health Policy in place. A good Employee Health Policy consists of three parts:

1) Employee training on foodborne illness, particularly symptoms and prevention of the Big Five;
2) Documentation that employees have been instructed to report symptoms of, diagnosis of or exposure to foodborne illness to management; and
3) A management plan to exclude or restrict employees from food handling, as applicable, who have symptoms of, diagnosis of or exposure to foodborne illness.

A fuller explanation is below:

1) Employee training on foodborne illness – How can a foodborne illness outbreak affect the business of the food establishment? What is foodborne illness, what are the symptoms and how does an employee prevent the spread of a foodborne illness? Particular attention should be paid to the *Big Five*. There is an easy-to-use information sheet on the Food Safety Section web page that will help with this training.
2) *An employee is responsible for reducing the risk of spreading a foodborne illness in a food establishment.* The employee should recognize symptoms and know what his responsibility is if he/she has foodborne illness symptoms. An FDA-designed *Employee Health Agreement* directly from the Food Code is available on our web page. With this agreement, the employee agrees to contact management if they have symptoms of, diagnosis of or exposure to a foodborne illness.
3) Management also has a responsibility in an Employee Health Policy. Employee training must be provided on points 1) and 2) above. Management must know what to do if an employee has symptoms of, or is diagnosed with a foodborne illness. Use the online *Employee Health Chart* to decide if an ill employee can come to work.

The *Big Five* information sheet, the *Employee Health Agreement* and the *Employee Health Guidelines* are available in multiple languages on the website at www.fairfaxcounty.gov/hd/food/foodtrain.htm or from your area Health Department inspector.

Your area inspector may ask if you have an Employee Health Policy. If you have an existing employee health policy, it must have, at a minimum, the above information included in it to be in compliance. Training on an Employee Health Policy can be arranged through the Health Department. If you have any questions about your employee health policy, please contact your area inspector or contact the Health Department at 703-246-2444, TTY 703-591-6435.

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 food 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!**
- **Training materials for Employee Health Policy available at www.fairfaxcounty.gov/hd/food/foodtrain.htm**

Initiative 2011:

Employee Health Policy

Effective January 1, 2011, the Food Safety Section of the Health Department started an initiative to help food establishments implement a valid Employee Health Policy. This 12 month program has two phases: 1) during the first inspection of the year, the area inspector will provide information which can be used as a basis for the Employee Health Policy in any establishment; 2) during a subsequent inspection (typically 6 months later), the area inspector will ask the operator to explain how an Employee Health Policy has been implemented in the establishment using the information that was given out 6 months earlier.

The Health Department is asking for your cooperation in this initiative. There will be new information and a learning curve involved. However, the establishment will be given the basis of a strong Employee Health Policy which can easily be included in new employee training. By implementing a new Employee Health Policy or incorporating this information into an existing Employee Health Policy, not only will the establishment be in compliance with the Food Code, the general public will benefit from the awareness employees have after completing the recommended training. How many foodborne illnesses can be prevented by training employees on the Big Five and getting employee buy-in on the responsibility they have to report symptoms of, diagnosis of and exposure to foodborne illness? If you have any questions about the Employee Health Policy Initiative, please contact the Health Department at 703-246-2444, TTY 703-591-6435.

2010 Baseline Survey Completed!

Between July 1 and December 31, 2010 the Health Department conducted a baseline survey as part of a five-year program assessment. A random sampling of food service establishments was 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. The risk factors are: 1) food from an unsafe source; 2) Inadequate cooking; 3) Improper cold/hot holding; 4) contaminated equipment; 5) poor personal hygiene. The Employee Health Policy Initiative was developed to address results from the baseline survey. Thank you for your participation. More detailed discussion of the results will be provided in future issues of this newsletter. If you have questions about the baseline survey results, please contact the Health Department at 703-246-2444, TTY 703-591-6435.

The 3-Legged Stool

Food safety equals the prevention of foodborne illness. The *3-legged stool* is the foundation on which food safety rests. The legs of the stool are: 1) proper handwashing; 2) no bare-hand contact with ready-to-eat foods; and 3) employee health. These are also referred to as *interventions*. An intervention is a method of preventing the spread of foodborne illness. If one of the legs is missing, the stool can not stand and the risk of foodborne illness increases.

Proper handwashing refers not only to washing thoroughly - scrubbing and washing hands for 20 seconds - but also to timely handwashing. Are employees washing their hands when they should? Are hands washed when gloves are changed? Are hands washed when changing tasks?

Bare hands always have the possibility of spreading foodborne germs through cross-contamination, regardless of proper handwashing. If a food is ready-to-eat such as bread, fruit, salads there must be no bare-hand contact because there will be no opportunity to kill bacteria by cooking.

The final leg of the three-legged stool is employee health. Through an enforced employee health policy, employees may recognize the symptoms of foodborne illness and know that they should report to management if they experience symptoms of, are diagnosed with, or exposed to foodborne illness.

If you have any questions regarding food safety interventions, contact your area inspector or the Health Department at 703-246-2444, TTY 703-591-6435.

Kitchen Corner Quiz

(answers below)

1. The Fairfax County Food Code requires that a food establishment have an Employee Health Policy. (T or F)
2. The Employee Health Policy Initiative is a 12 month program to help every food establishment implement a valid employee health policy. (T or F)
3. How many parts are there to a good employee health policy:
   1) 1 2) 3 3) 5
4. The prevention of foodborne illness is only the food service manager's responsibility. (T or F)
5. Public health interventions are used to prevent the spread of foodborne illness. (T or F)

Answers: 1. T; 2. T; 3. 2 (three); 4. F; 5. T

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