

Food *for thought*

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A newsletter for Fairfax County food establishment owners, operators, and their employees

What is a Risk Factor? *Hint: There are 5!*

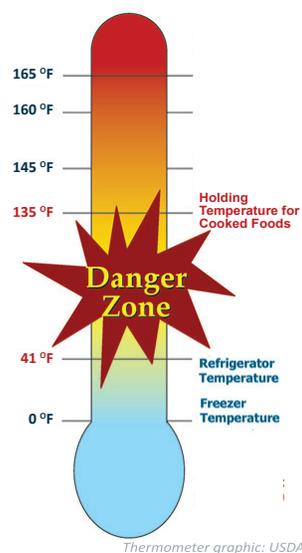
When talking about food safety, the most important topic is the prevention of foodborne illness—Job #1 in any restaurant is to prevent foodborne illness. According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), there are five risk factors that lead to foodborne illness in a restaurant. The 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 safe sources. 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

Potentially hazardous food must be temperature controlled to prevent foodborne illness. 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



Thermometer graphic: USDA

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!

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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 foods **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!

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What is a Risk Factor?

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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 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 methods the food establishment uses to reduce the occurrence of risk factors. Inspectors take temperatures of hot and cold foods and evaluate cook temperatures. Inspectors also observe whether employees are washing their hands when they should. Cleaning and sanitizing procedures are observed, as well. 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 www.fairfaxcounty.gov/hd/food.

Kitchen Corner Quiz

Are the statements below true or false?

1. The CDC has identified five risk factors that can lead to a foodborne illness in a food establishment. (True or False)
2. Food served in a restaurant may be prepared at home. (True or False)
3. The longer that food is in the Danger Zone the more chance bacteria can grow and foodborne illness can result. (True or False)
4. Cleaning and sanitizing food prep surfaces helps prevent cross-contamination. (True or False)
5. Food is cooked properly only when it reaches a certain temperature. (True or False)
6. It is okay to handle a sandwich with your bare hands when preparing it for the customer. (True or False)
7. Disposable gloves should be used when handling ready-to-eat foods. (True or False)
8. It is not necessary to wash your hands when you change gloves. (True or False)
9. Handwashing is the most important step in preventing the spread of foodborne illness. (True or False)

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?

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