Employees are First Line of Defense Against Foodborne Illness

Your employees are the first line of defense in the prevention of foodborne illness. They receive the food, they cook the food, and they serve the food. This issue of Food for Thought will concentrate on what you and your employees should know about the relationship between their health and the prevention of foodborne illness. Should they be coming to work if they are sick?

Any discussion of employee health in a food service environment begins with training. During new-employee training or orientation, it should be made clear that part of the job responsibility of all employees is to keep the food safe to prevent foodborne illness in customers. This includes regular handwashing and recognizing the symptoms of foodborne illness in themselves and/or family members. In general, the most common symptoms of foodborne illness are vomiting, diarrhea, jaundice and sore-throat with fever. Employees must be instructed to call management before coming to work if exhibiting any of the above symptoms. The manager must also recognize these symptoms. If an employee is constantly going to the restroom with “stomach problems”, the manager should take notice. This is especially important if the food establishment serves a “highly susceptible population,” such as a nursing home or a child day care center.

In general, if an employee has any of the symptoms listed above, he/she should not be working around food. However, depending on the types of symptoms and the type of food establishment, the manager has two options. The first is to restrict the employee from working directly with food, but allow the employee to work elsewhere in the establishment in areas that do not relate to food preparation – sweeping floors or clearing tables, for example. The other option is to exclude the employee entirely from the food establishment. In this case, medical attention may be required and the employee must not exhibit any symptoms for at least 24 hours before being allowed back to work. If an employee has been diagnosed with Norovirus, E.coli O157:H7, Shigella, Hepatitis A virus, or (Page 2)

Foodborne Illness

Facts in the U.S.

- 76,000,000 cases of foodborne illness annually
- 325,000 hospitalizations
- 5000 deaths per year
- Salmonella causes the most foodborne illness cases each year.
- Handwashing is the best prevention!

Changes to Fairfax County Food Code

New legislation was adopted on July 1, 2009 by the Fairfax County Board of Supervisors which amended the Fairfax County Food Code to include fees for re-inspections of food establishments and re-instatement of suspended food service permits. If an operator is issued a Notice of Violation (NOV), a follow-up inspection is required after the NOV. There will be a $100 fee assessed for that follow-up inspection and any other follow-up inspection that is related to the original non-compliance issue. If a Permit to Operate is suspended by the Health Department, for any reason, a $200 fee will be required before the permit will be re-instated. If you have any questions about the new fee structure, please call the Health Department at 703-246-2444.
Salmonella Typhii (or if someone in their household is diagnosed with one of these illnesses), immediately contact the Health Department at 703-246-2444 for guidance. Your Health Department representative has a copy of the Employee Illness Decision Guide or call the Health Department to receive a copy. The Guide is useful in knowing what to do when an employee indicates he/she may have the symptoms of a foodborne illness. The Guide is also available at www.fairfaxcounty.gov/hd/food.

H1N1 Update for Food Establishments

Fairfax County Health Department has received reports of food service establishments being contacted and told they must have H1N1 prevention kits alongside their first aid kits in the kitchens. Fairfax County Health Department does not require any type of H1N1 prevention kit. The Health Department reminds all food service establishments that the best prevention of the spread of H1N1 virus is diligent attention to proper handwashing. CDC recommends that people with influenza-like illness remain at home until at least 24 hours after they are free of fever (100°F [37.8°C]), or signs of a fever, without the use of fever-reducing medications. When people who have had influenza-like illness return to work, school, or other community settings they should continue to cover their cough, practice proper handwashing techniques and avoid close contact with people they know to be at increased risk of influenza-related complications. More information is available at www.fairfaxcounty.gov/hd.

Smoking Ban in Effect December 1, 2009

New legislation will go into effect on December 01, 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.

NFSEM Wrap-Up

September was National Food Safety Education Month. The theme was “Food Safety Thrives When You Focus on Five!” The underlying theme was to minimize foodborne illness risk factors in the food establishments. The educational information from this program is available at www.servsafe.com/nfsem. The July issue of Food for Thought has some very specific information which relates to the NFSEM theme. Previous issues of Food for Thought are available in the newsletter archive located on our website at www.fairfaxcounty.gov/hd/food.

Kitchen Corner Quiz

1. Who is the first line of defense against foodborne illness?
   A. Doctors and nurses
   B. National Guard
   C. Food Service Employees

2. Two ways that employees can prevent the spread of foodborne illness are:
   A. Be on time to work and take short breaks.
   B. Recognize symptoms of foodborne illness and wash hands regularly.
   C. Wear a hat and apron in the kitchen.

3. What are symptoms of foodborne illness?
   A. Sneezing, itchy rash
   B. Sleeplessness, bags under the eyes
   C. Vomiting, diarrhea, jaundice and sore throat with fever

Answers: 1.C, 2.B, 3.C,