Safe Food Is YOUR Job—

Health and Hygiene Tips for Food Handlers

Preparing and serving food to the public carries tremendous responsibility. Your customers’ health, your employer’s reputation—and your job—depend on your hands and your actions.

Did you know?
• An estimated 48 million foodborne illnesses occur each year in the United States.
• About three-fourths of these illnesses result from eating food prepared away from home.
• It is estimated that about half of those who get a foodborne illness each year become sick from Norovirus.

Norovirus has stomach-flu-like symptoms and often is linked to food handlers who didn’t wash their hands properly.

Why?
• Norovirus is very small and easily transmitted through projectile vomiting.
• Special care must be taken to clean areas thoroughly after incidents.
• Fewer than 100 Norovirus particles are enough to make a person sick.

Want to know more? www.cdc.gov/norovirus/food-handlers/work-with-food.html

What can you do?
1. If you’re sick, stay home.
2. Keep your hands primed—practice the when and how of proper handwashing.
3. Wear clean and appropriate work attire.

Safe Food Action #1—Don’t go to work when you are sick
Talk with your manager if you don’t feel well.

If you have these… this is what to expect:
• Sore throat and fever 
  • You’ll be restricted from working with or around food.
  • You’ll be excluded from the operation if a high-risk population is primarily served.

• Symptoms of vomiting, diarrhea, or jaundice
  • You’ll be excluded from the operation until NO symptoms of vomiting or diarrhea are present for at least 24 hours AND/OR a written release from a medical practitioner is obtained.
  Note: jaundice requires both.

• Diagnosis of foodborne illness from: Norovirus, Hepatitis A, Nontyphoidal Salmonella, Salmonella Typhi, Shigella spp., and shiga toxin-producing E. coli
  • You’ll be excluded from the operation until released by a medical practitioner and/or local regulatory authority.

• Back at work, but still on medications
  • Keep your medications in a covered and labeled container in storage away from food served to others.

Safe Food Action #2—Keep your hands primed—practice the when and how of handwashing

Wash your hands BEFORE
• Beginning work with food
• Entering or returning to kitchen/work area
• Handling clean dishware and equipment
• Handling raw meat, poultry and seafood
• Putting on gloves (remember no bare hand contact with ready to eat foods!)

Wash your hands AFTER
• Using the restroom
• Handling raw meat, poultry, and seafood
• Touching hair, face, or body
• Sneezing, coughing, or using a tissue
• Taking out the garbage
• Clearing tables or busing dirty dishes
• Smoking, eating, drinking, and chewing gum or tobacco
• Handling chemicals (should not be done in food prep and storage areas)
• Touching clothing or aprons
• Touching anything that may contaminate hands, such as dirty equipment, work surfaces, or wiping towels
• Handling money
Safe Food Is YOUR Job

Safe Food Action #3—Wear clean and appropriate work attire, follow guidelines

- Wear a hair net, skull cap or bandana to effectively keep hair out of food
- Wear clean clothing daily—better yet, change into work clothes at work
- Remove aprons or chef coats when leaving food preparation areas
  - Break time? Don’t take your apron or coat with you (especially into the restroom!)
- Remove jewelry from hands and arms prior to preparing food and when working around food preparation areas—only plain ring bands are allowed.

Want to be employee of the month?

- Keep fingernails short and clean
- Don’t wear false fingernails or nail polish
- Wear a bandage over cuts, sores, or wounds on hands and arms. Make sure that bandage is secure and that a glove is worn over it.
- Cough into your sleeve, not hands. Watch the video on how to cough and sneeze: [www.coughsafe.com/media.html](http://www.coughsafe.com/media.html)
- Practice smart glove use
  - Think about how you organize what you do and when you do it—watch the glove video at [www.iowafoodsafety.org](http://www.iowafoodsafety.org)
  - Change gloves
    - As soon as they become soiled or torn
    - Before beginning a different task—even touching the refrigerator handle
    - At least every four hours during continual use (it’s break time anyway)
    - After handling raw meat, poultry, or fish and before handling ready to eat food
    - After handling money

Handwashing is the MOST CRITICAL control step in prevention of disease

Invest 20 seconds to follow these 6 simple steps (think 20/6—24/7):

1. Wet your hands and arms with running water as hot as you can comfortably stand
2. Apply soap and rub up a good lather
3. Scrub hands and arms vigorously for 10 to 15 seconds (clean under nails and between fingers)
4. Rinse hands and arms thoroughly under running warm water
5. Dry hands and arms with a single-use paper towel or automatic hand dryer
6. Use the paper towel to turn off faucets and open door handles so you don’t re-contaminate your hands

Use a towel, not your apron!

See bacterial growth from fingers wiped on an apron (top) and from an apron (bottom)

Additional Resources
Iowa State University Extension and Outreach Food Safety Project, [www.iowafoodsafety.org](http://www.iowafoodsafety.org)

Food and Drug Administration’s Oral Culture Resources, [www.fda.gov/Food/GuidanceRegulation/RetailFoodProtection/IndustryandRegulatoryAssistanceandTrainingResources/ucm212661.htm](http://www.fda.gov/Food/GuidanceRegulation/RetailFoodProtection/IndustryandRegulatoryAssistanceandTrainingResources/ucm212661.htm)

Modified by Catherine Strohbehn, PhD, RD, CP-FS from 2009 Publication by Amy Casselman and Catherine Strohbehn. Reviewed by Susan Arendt, PhD, RD, CHE, FAND and Diane Duncan Goldsmith, M.S. RD.

Information is based on Food Code 2009.

... and justice for all

The U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) prohibits discrimination in all its programs and activities on the basis of race, color, national origin, age, disability, and where applicable, sex, marital status, familial status, parental status, religion, sexual orientation, genetic information, political beliefs, reprisal, or because all or part of an individual's income is derived from any public assistance program. (Not all prohibited bases apply to all programs.) Persons with disabilities who require alternative means for communication of program information (Braille, large print, audiotape, etc.) should contact USDA’s TARGET Center at 202-720-2600 (voice and TDD). To file a complaint of discrimination, write to USDA, Director, Office of Civil Rights, 1400 Independence Avenue SW, Washington, DC 20250-9410, or call 800-795-3272 (voice) or 202-720-6382 (TDD). USDA is an equal opportunity provider and employer. Issued in furtherance of Cooperative Extension work, Acts of May 8 and June 30, 1914, in cooperation with the U.S. Department of Agriculture. Cathann A. Kress, director, Cooperative Extension Service, Iowa State University of Science and Technology, Ames, Iowa.