

## THE SAFE FOOD HANDLER

Only foodservice workers who are healthy and practice good personal hygiene should be allowed to work in your restaurant. Workers can contaminate food by: working while they are sick; touching pimples or sores; touching their hair; not wearing a band-aid and single-use gloves over sores and wounds; and not washing their hands properly before, during, and after handling food.

One of the best ways that a foodservice manager can keep food safe is to implement food safety policies that promote good personal hygiene. The policies should address:

- personal cleanliness – workers properly bathed;
- proper work attire – workers wearing clean hat or hair restraint, clean clothing, appropriate shoes, and removing jewelry; and
- good hygiene practices – workers frequently and properly washing their hands, having short fingernails, and properly using gloves.

### Handwashing Basics

Hands are probably the most common way that harmful microorganisms get into foods in a restaurant. Hands can become soiled with a variety of contaminants while a worker is performing routine tasks.

All restaurants must have an accessible handwashing sink that is well stocked with hand soap and a way to dry hands. The soap can be either liquid or bar soap; it does not have to be antibacterial. Instant hand sanitizer can be available but it is not required.

It is important that handwashing be done only at a properly maintained handwashing sink. Warm water is more effective than cold water in removing dirt and microorganisms from hands. An adequate flow of warm water will cause soap to lather and help remove soil quickly from the hands. The water should be at least 100°F (40°C).

Some workers will not wash their hands unless properly equipped handwashing sinks are accessible to their work area. Sinks that are improperly located, blocked by portable equipment, or stacked full of soiled utensils and other items, are difficult to use. Nothing must block the approach to a handwashing sink.

Hands must never be washed in a food preparation sink because this may contaminate the sink and the food prepared in it. Service sinks also cannot be used for handwashing because this practice may introduce additional hand contaminants, such as mop water, toxic chemicals, and a variety of other liquid wastes.

### Proper Handwashing

Workers must wash their hands after any task that might contaminate their hands. Always wash hands:

- after using the bathroom
- after coughing, sneezing, smoking, eating, or drinking
- after bussing a table
- before putting on gloves
- after handling animals

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- when switching between raw and ready-to-eat food
  - after handling garbage or trash
  - after handling dirty equipment or utensils;
  - during food preparation.

### **Instant Hand Sanitizers**

Instant hand sanitizers should only be used on properly washed hands. Therefore, food workers must always wash their hands before the hand sanitizer is applied. Hand sanitizers can never replace handwashing. Furthermore, only hand sanitizers approved by the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) can be used in a restaurant.

### **Fingernails**

Fingernails (real or artificial) and nail polish can become a physical hazard. Therefore, workers must keep their nails trimmed and filed. Long nails can easily break and end up in food. Also if nails are long, dirt and microorganisms can collect beneath them. If workers want to wear fingernail polish or artificial fingernails, they must wear single-use gloves.

### **Cover cuts, wounds, and sores**

Lesions containing pus that might be on a worker's hands or forearms, can introduce bacteria into food. If a worker has an infected cut and bandages it, plus puts on a glove, they do not have to report the infected cut to the manager. However, if the worker does not bandage it, they must let their manager know about the infected cut.

### **Single-use Gloves**

Hands must be properly washed before a worker puts on single-use gloves. Gloves must be thrown out when they become dirty. Provide workers with non-latex gloves because latex gloves might cause allergic reactions in some workers. Always change gloves when they tear; before beginning a new task; every four hours when doing the same task; and after handling raw meat, fish, or poultry.

### **Hair Restraint**

Consumers are particularly sensitive to food contaminated by hair. Food workers might contaminate their hands when they touch their hair. A hair restraint keeps hair from ending up in the food and it also may deter employees from touching their hair.

### **Clothing**

Dirty clothing could also be a source of microorganisms. Food workers who inadvertently touch their dirty clothing may contaminate their hands. This could result in contamination of the food being prepared. Food may also be contaminated through direct contact with dirty clothing. In addition, workers wearing dirty clothes send a negative message to customers about the level of sanitation in the restaurant.

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## **Jewelry**

Jewelry, such as rings, bracelets, and watches, might get dirty. As a result, the jewelry may be a source of harmful microorganisms. Medical information bracelets also cannot be worn. They can only be worn if they are high on the arm or secured in a manner that does not pose a risk to the food but still provides emergency medical information if it is needed.

An additional hazard associated with jewelry is the possibility that pieces of the item or the whole item itself may fall into the food being prepared. Hard foreign objects in food may cause medical problems for consumers, such as chipped and/or broken teeth, internal cuts, or lesions.

## **Bare-hand Contact**

Minimize bare-hand contact of ready-to-eat food. Ready-to-eat food (RTE) includes cooked food, raw fruits and vegetables, baked goods, dried sausages, canned food, snack foods, and beverages. It is best to handle these foods with hands that are properly covered with single-use gloves, cleaned and sanitized utensils, and/or deli papers.

## **Reporting Foodborne Illness to the Local Health Department**

Diseases, such as AIDS (Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome), hepatitis B and C, and tuberculosis, are not spread through food. However, other diseases can be spread through food. If a worker is diagnosed with one of the following foodborne illnesses, the manager must report it to the local health department:

- Hepatitis A virus
- *E. coli* 0157:H7
- *Salmonella Typhi*
- *Shigella* spp.
- [Norovirus](#)

## **Excluding or Restricting Workers**

Excluding is when a worker is not allowed in the establishment except for those areas open to the general public. A restricted worker may work in an area of the restaurant where there is wrapped food, wrapped single-service or single-use articles, or soiled food equipment or utensils. Examples of activities that a restricted person might do include working at the cash register, seating patrons, bussing tables, stocking canned or other packaged foods, or working in a non-food cleaning or maintenance capacity. A worker who is restricted from working in one restaurant may not work in an unrestricted capacity in another restaurant. A worker with an unprotected, uninfected cut, or a food worker with a covered, protected infected cut/lesion/boil because it requires no bare hand contact with ready-to-eat food does not need to be restricted from handling food.

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## Policies for Reporting Illness and Injury

If	Then
The worker has one of the following symptoms: <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Fever</li><li>• Diarrhea</li><li>• Vomiting</li><li>• Sore throat with fever</li><li>• Jaundice (a yellowing of the skin and eyes)</li></ul>	Restrict them from working with or around food.  Exclude them from the establishment if you primarily serve a high-risk population.
The worker has been diagnosed with <i>Salmonella typhi</i> , <i>Shigella</i> spp., <i>E. coli</i> 0157:H7, or hepatitis A virus	Exclude them from the establishment and immediately notify your local health department.  Managers must report to the local health department if a worker is diagnosed with one of the following: <i>Salmonella typhi</i> , <i>Shigella</i> spp.; <i>E. coli</i> 0157:H7, or hepatitis A virus  The manager must work with the local health department to determine when the worker can safely return to work.

### Management's Role in Implementing Good Personal Hygiene Policies

- Incorporate good personal hygiene policies into your food safety plan.
- Train food handlers on personal hygiene policies.
- Model good hygiene practices for workers at all times.
- Supervise workers' practices continuously.
- Revise policies when laws and regulations change.

### Other Policies

Smoking or eating by workers in food preparation areas is prohibited because hands, food, and food-contact surfaces might become contaminated. Poor hygiene practices, such as scratching the head, placing the fingers in or about the mouth or nose, and indiscriminate and uncovered sneezing or coughing could cause food contamination.

Food preparation areas such as hot grills are often very warm. The excessive heat in these areas may present a medical risk to the workers as a result of dehydration. Therefore, in these areas food workers can drink beverages from a covered container with a straw.

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## **Animals**

Animals can be a source of harmful microorganisms. This is the reason that live animals cannot be on the premises of a restaurant. The only exceptions are: edible/decorative fish in an aquarium; shellfish or crustacea on ice under refrigeration or in display tanks; patrol dogs or sentry dogs; service animals ; or live fish bait.

The Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) defines a service animal as any guide dog, signal dog, or other animal individually trained to provide assistance to an individual with a disability. If the animal meets this definition, it is considered a service animal under the ADA regardless of whether it has been licensed or certified by a state or local government.

Service animals perform some of the functions and tasks that the individual with a disability cannot perform for him or herself. "Seeing eye dogs" are one type of service animal, used by some individuals who are blind. This is the type of service animal with which most people are familiar. But there are service animals that assist persons with other kinds of disabilities in their day-to-day activities. Some examples include:

- Alerting persons with hearing impairments to sounds.
- Pulling wheelchairs or carrying and picking up things for persons with mobility impairments.
- Assisting persons with mobility impairments with balance.

Some, but not all, service animals wear special collars and harnesses. Some, but not all, are also licensed or certified and have identification papers. If you are not certain that an animal is a service animal, you should ask the person who has the animal if it is a service animal required because of a disability. However, an individual who is going to a restaurant or theater is not likely to be carrying documentation of his or her medical condition or disability. Therefore, such documentation generally may not be required as a condition for providing service to an individual accompanied by a service animal. Although a number of states have programs to certify service animals, you cannot insist on proof of state certification before permitting the service animal to accompany the person with a disability.

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