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No Reservations

No Reservations **is a monthly newsletter published by RQA Inc. for the restaurant industry.**

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CDC Offers New Environmental Health and Tools to Improve Food Safety in Restaurants

More than half of all foodborne illness outbreaks in the United States are associated with restaurants, delis, banquet facilities, schools and other institutions according to CDC's Surveillance for Foodborne Disease Outbreaks – United States, 1998-2008. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention's Environmental Health Specialists Network (EHS-Net) announces four new publications on restaurant food handling practices that have been linked with foodborne illness outbreaks in restaurant settings. These publications are on the following topics:

- ground beef handling,
- handling of leafy greens,
- chicken cross-contamination, and
- sick food workers.

Food safety programs and the restaurant industry can use these findings to develop effective interventions to improve food safety in restaurants.

Ground Beef Handling and Cooking Practices

EHS-Net did the Ground Beef Handling and Cooking Practices study because of the link between *E. coli* O157:H7 infections and eating in restaurants. The study describes ground beef preparation practices that could lead to cross-contamination of other foods from raw ground beef and to undercooking of hamburgers made from ground beef. Cross contamination and undercooked ground beef can lead to foodborne illness. EHS-Net found that many restaurants prepared ground beef in ways that could lead to cross contamination or undercooking. For example, in 62% of restaurants where workers used bare hands to handle raw ground beef, workers did not wash their hands after handling it. And about 80% of managers said that they did not always use a thermometer to make sure that hamburgers were cooked to the right temperature. This study also found that chain restaurants and restaurants with kitchen managers who are certified in food safety had safer ground beef practices than other restaurants.

Handling Practices of Fresh Leafy Greens: Receiving and Training

Foodborne illness outbreaks have been associated with fresh produce like leafy greens (such as lettuce and spinach). Restaurants' leafy greens handling practices could contribute to foodborne illness outbreaks. EHS-Net did the Handling Practices of Fresh Leafy Greens: Receiving and Training Study to learn more about how restaurant workers handle leafy greens. EHS-Net found that many restaurants safely handle leafy greens. For example, most restaurants met the U.S. Food and Drug Administration's (FDA's) guidelines for rejecting shipments of leafy greens and for keeping purchase records for leafy greens. However, most restaurants did not meet FDA guidelines for refrigerating cut leafy greens at 41°F or below.

Continued:

Frequency of Inadequate Chicken Cross Contamination Prevention and Cooking Practices

Poultry is the most common food associated with deaths from foodborne illness in the United States. Foodborne illness linked with chicken can be caused by cross-contamination of other foods from raw chicken or by undercooked chicken. EHS-Net did the Frequency of Inadequate Chicken Cross Contamination Prevention and Cooking study to learn more about how restaurant workers prepare and cook chicken. EHS-Net found that many restaurants did not follow FDA's advice when preparing and cooking chicken. For example, 40% of managers said that they do not always designate specific cutting boards for use only with raw chicken. Additionally, over half of managers said that thermometers were not used to check the final cook temperature of chicken.

Food Worker Experiences with and Beliefs about Working While Ill

Sick food workers can transmit germs from themselves to the food they prepare. People who eat that food can then get sick. This is an important cause of foodborne illness outbreaks. EHS-Net did the Food Worker Experiences with and Beliefs about Working While Ill study to learn more about factors that influence restaurant workers' decisions to work while sick. EHS-Net found that 20% of workers said that they had worked a shift in the past year when sick with vomiting or diarrhea, which are symptoms of foodborne illness. Additionally, workers with concerns about leaving their coworkers short-staffed and losing their job if they did not come to work because they were sick were more likely to say that they had worked with vomiting or diarrhea.

Explaining the Risk of Foodborne Illness Associated with Restaurants

These four study publications are accompanied by an overview that provides perspective on EHS-Net study findings and their potential impact. It also talks about EHS-Net's systems-based approach to evaluating food handling practices in restaurants.

Explaining the Risk of Foodborne Illness Associated with Restaurants: The Environmental Health Specialists Network (EHS-Net)

Source:: http://www.cdc.gov/nceh/ehs/News/Features/2013/JFP-articles.html

Elementary School Cafeteria, Oahu, HI. December 2013

State health officials have determined that the cause of a foodborne illness last week that sickened 30 students and two adults at an Oahu elementary school was bacteria-tainted spaghetti.

According to a Monday news article, the state Department of Health said spaghetti cooked the previous day at the elementary school was not properly heated the day it was served, which created "an environment for bacteria growth." The food also may not have been properly cooled the day it was cooked, the department said in a statement.

"An inspection and interviews with cafeteria employees revealed food preparation violations that could be corrected with proper training and follow through," said Peter Oshiro, head of the department's Sanitation Branch. "We understand the school closed the cafeteria to retrain their food service staff and ensure safe food practices."

The department's Food Safety Program is conducting food safety training for school cafeteria staff and management. Meanwhile, meals have brought in from a neighboring school.

Those sickened on Dec. 10 experienced dizziness, nausea and vomiting, and school officials immediately suspected food poisoning as the cause.

"While this was an isolated incident, our staff has and continues to fully cooperate with health officials in ensuring best practice," said the Elementary School Principal. "We appreciate the patience and understanding of our school community and remain committed to proper meal preparation."

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Popular Sandwich Franchise, Garden City, KS. January 2014

The Kansas Department of Health and Environment (KDHE) has confirmed norovirus as the cause of an outbreak of gastrointestinal illness associated with a gourmet sandwiches restaurant in Garden City, KS. Norovirus was detected by the Kansas Health and Environmental Laboratories at KDHE in clinical specimens from three people associated with the outbreak.

KDHE has been working closely with the Finney County Health Department and the Kansas Department of Agriculture (KDA) to investigate this outbreak since it was first reported on Dec. 18, 2013.

In addition to laboratory testing, the Finney County Health Department and KDHE have been contacting diners by telephone and an online survey to determine the scope and extent of the outbreak. As of Jan. 3 at 4 p.m., 282 people had reported becoming ill with gastrointestinal symptoms after eating at the restaurant from Dec. 10-24, 2013. Of those, 209 people were ill within 10 to 72 hours of eating, with symptoms consistent with norovirus (vomiting and/or diarrhea).

The restaurant was inspected by KDA on Dec. 18 and again on Dec. 24. The restaurant voluntarily closed from Dec. 24 through Dec. 26 to conduct a special cleaning and disinfection procedure. No new cases of illness among patrons have been reported since the restaurant reopened on Dec. 27. The restaurant fully cooperated with KDA, KDHE and the county health department during the entire investigation.

Norovirus typically causes gastrointestinal illness such as nausea, vomiting, abdominal pain, diarrhea and low-grade fever and is easily passed from person to person or through food that has been contaminated during preparation. It often causes large outbreaks, affecting a large percentage of people who were exposed.

The best way to prevent norovirus is proper handwashing, excluding ill persons from preparing food, and proper cleaning and sanitizing of food preparation areas.

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