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No Reservations

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

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Fresh Produce Safety

What do spinach, cantaloupe, lettuce, and peppers all have in common? They were all implicated in significant foodborne illness outbreaks that occurred in the United States. In fact, during 1998 – 2008, 46% of foodborne illnesses reported in the U.S. were associated with produce and more illnesses were attributed to leafy vegetables than to any other commodity (1). Therefore, while it may be tempting to consider only raw poultry, meat, and fish as being potentially hazardous, it is equally important to handle raw produce carefully to ensure the safety of these foods.

As with all items on your menu, food safety considerations for produce should begin before the food even enters your establishment. To begin, obtain produce from only approved food suppliers who are in compliance with local, state, and federal laws. If foodservice regulations in your district allow you to buy locally grown produce, visit the gardens to ensure that Good Agricultural Practices are in place. If produce is advertised as organic, make sure it has been grown in accordance with the USDA organic regulations. Also, because good record keeping is essential, always obtain a dated receipt that identifies the food purchased and includes the grower's name and address.

Before taking ownership of fresh produce, look for signs of spoilage such as mold, bruising, wilting, mushiness, and unpleasant odors and tastes. Specific storage recommendations depend on the commodity because fresh fruits and vegetables can be stored for various lengths of time and require different storage conditions. However, fruits and vegetables stored at room temperature should be kept in a clean, cool, dry, pest-free environment. Perishable produce and *all* pre-cut or peeled fruits and vegetables should be stored in a clean refrigerator set at 40°F or less and placed on shelves above raw meats, poultry, or fish.

Wash produce thoroughly under running, potable water prior to cutting or cooking. Scrub firm produce, such as melons, cucumbers, and potatoes, with a clean brush that is used only for produce. When cleaning leafy greens, remove outer leaves and rinse layers thoroughly. Even produce that is going to be peeled prior to preparation should be washed thoroughly to prevent transfer of dirt and bacteria from the outside into the inside of the fruit or vegetable. Lastly, promptly refrigerate all produce that has been cut, chopped, or cooked.

Offering healthy options, such as fresh fruits and vegetables, can potentially boost sales by appealing to a growing population of health conscious consumers. However, whether it is a sliced tomato for a burger or a fresh salad as an entrée, be diligent about the safety of the produce you serve…..your customers' health depends on it.

1. Painter JA, Hoekstra RM, Ayers T, Tauxe RV, Braden CR, Angulo FJ, Griffin PM. Attribution of Foodborne Illnesses, Hospitalizations, and Deaths to Food Commodities by using Outbreak Data, United States, 1998–2008 *Emerging Infectious Diseases*. Vol. 19, No. 3, March 2013

Pathogen Spotlight: Salmonella species

As mentioned in our Main Course article, produce was associated with almost half of foodborne illness outbreaks reported during 1998 – 2008. However, the story continues. More deaths from foodborne illnesses were attributed to poultry than to any other commodity, and many poultry-associated deaths were caused by *Salmonella* spp (1).

There are over 2,500 serotypes of *Salmonella* (2). Depending on the serotype, *Salmonella* can cause two types of illness: nontyphoidal salmonellosis and typhoid fever. Typhoid fever, caused by *S. enterica* serotype Typhi, is relatively rare in the United States. Because this pathogen is found only in humans, illness is usually associated with sewage-contaminated drinking water or food contaminated by an infected food handler. Conversely, it estimated that 1,027,561 cases of nontyphoidal salmonellosis occur annually in the U.S and is typically acquired from contaminated raw poultry, eggs, and unpasteurized milk and cheese products (2).

Restaurant-associated foodborne illness outbreaks involving *Salmonella* have been caused by cross-contamination, food contaminated by ill food workers, and contaminated poultry, eggs, and produce. To protect your patrons from *Salmonella,* follow these recommendations: do not allow employees to work while ill; enforce strict adherence to handwashing procedures; prevent touching ready-to-eat foods with bare hands; ensure raw animal products are cooked to the proper internal temperature; properly wash and store fresh produce; and have systems in place to prevent cross-contamination.



Salmonella

References

1. Painter JA, Hoekstra RM, Ayers T, Tauxe RV, Braden CR, Angulo FJ, Griffin PM. Attribution of Foodborne Illnesses, Hospitalizations, and Deaths to Food Commodities by using Outbreak Data, United States, 1998–2008 *Emerging Infectious Diseases*. Vol. 19, No. 3, March 2013
2. U.S. Food and Drug Administration. Bad Bug Book - Foodborne Pathogenic Microorganisms and Natural Toxins - Second Edition. Internet:: http://www.fda.gov/downloads/Food/FoodSafety/FoodborneIllness/FoodborneIllnessFoodbornePathogensNaturalToxins/BadBugBook/UCM297627.pdf

Mexican Restaurant, Chickasha, OK — March 2013

A Mexican restaurant in Grady County, Oklahoma has been pinpointed as the source of a Salmonella outbreak that sickened six people over the last two months. The Oklahoma State Department of Health announced Friday that the restaurant located in Chickasha, was the most likely origin of the Salmonella Enteriditis that caused the outbreak, reported the Express-Star. All six victims were infected with matching strains of the bacteria, as revealed by DNA testing. The establishment had closed four days previous to this announcement after health inspectors discovered that its walk-in cooler was not functioning effectively. The restaurant is working to fix existing sanitation problems and come into compliance with health code so that it can reopen, according to Dr. Laura Smithee, chief of acute diseases for OSDH, according to the Express-Star.

http://www.foodsafetynews.com

Australian Brunch Restaurant, New York City, NY — March 2013

The city Health Department shut down a popular bar, the Australian boozy-brunch spot that struggled to get back on its feet following Hurricane Sandy. Inspectors found numerous health violations at the restaurant near the corner of East Ninth Street, including evidence of rats, food preparation surfaces that were not properly washed, as well as the cross-contamination of raw and prepared food, according to the Department of Health and Mental Hygiene's website. The restaurant clocked up 56 violation points in Friday's inspection, including the space not being considered "vermin proof" and its toilet facility not being well maintained and having no toilet paper, according to the Health Department's report. The owner of the restaurant blamed the continuing recovery from Hurricane Sandy for his restaurant's dismal inspection report. "The hurricane and now this — it is a disaster," said the owner. Like other restaurants nearby, the eatery's basement flooded during Sandy. Much of the avenue's establishments experienced months of gas, electricity and internet outages. The owner said the majority of the inspection points had been racked up in the basement, which the restaurant now only uses to store beer and soda. "We made it clear to them that we didn't use the basement…but they [inspectors] insisted on going down there," he said. He added he nonetheless hopes to resume brunch service this coming weekend. In February, the restaurant managed to reopen after Con Edison had shut it down for a month due to safety concerns, according to the owner.

http://newyork.grubstreet.com

Ethiopian Restaurant, Seattle, WA. — March 2013

The number confirmed ill in an E. coli outbreak linked to a Seattle Ethiopian restaurant has risen to three, according to King County Public Health spokeswoman Kathryn Ross. The health agency forced the closure of the Ethiopian restaurant on March 6 after connecting the establishment to an E. coli O157:H7 outbreak, along with finding seven critical health violations and another five non-critical violations. During the March 6 inspection, health officials found surfaces in contact with raw meat not properly cleaned, inadequate handwashing facilities for workers, and improper methods used to prevent bare hand contact with ready-to-eat foods. The restaurant has remained closed, and the owners are currently working with the county health agency to correct the concerns in hopes of reopening, Ross said.

http://www.foodsafetynews.com

Asian Restaurant, Pinellas Park, FL. — December 2012

A large, popular Asian restaurant in Pinellas Park was shut down by the state after an inspector documented 15 critical violations during its December 6 inspection. The inspector found food stored on the floor, slime in the ice machine, and about 75-100 rodent droppings near the bulk food storage bins, 10 droppings near the dishwasher area, and 10 droppings on top of cans in a storage closet. The inspector also documented employees not following their training, and that the food manager was unable to answer basic food code questions.

http://www.wtsp.com

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