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No Reservations

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Cater to your Clients but Keep Food Safety a Priority

Spring time has finally arrived and with it better weather. As the weather improves guests like to entertain outdoors which will increase catering orders. It is also the time of year when people celebrate graduations, weddings and other events. However, along with the good fortune of increased business comes an increase in the amount of food orders to prepare, cook, hold, cool, reheat, serve and deliver. All of this has to be done in conjunction with maintaining your establishment as well. That said, your staff must be prepared to endure the increase in their work load, and your facility must be able to accommodate for the increase in food production. This will also increase the risk of foodborne illness. Listed below are some topics to consider when adjusting to an increase in catering orders.

One of the first issues of concern is training. The foodhandlers must be properly trained in your food safety policies and procedures specific to catering orders. When your staff is overwhelmed or stressed due to lack of training, they will be more likely to make a critical mistake. Areas to focus on are proper storage, cooking, holding, cooling, reheating, and serving. Improper cooling of potentially hazardous food (PHF) is one of the leading causes of foodborne illness. Remember, the PHF must cool within a specific time and temperature range (please check with your local jurisdiction). Once the PHF reaches 135°F it must cool to 70°F within two hours, and then it must cool from 70°F to 41°F within four hours. Spore forming bacteria (Clostridium botulinum, Clostridium perfringens & Bacillus cereus) are of particular concern in the cooling process, so it is imperative that your staff understands the importance of proper cooling of PHF.

Transportation of the food is another concern. The food must be transported in containers that are smooth and easily cleanable and be able to maintain the PHF outside of the temperature danger zone of 41°F-135°F (please refer to your local jurisdiction). Maintaining a temperature log that records the temperature of the PHF as it leaves and arrives to the catering site is strongly suggested.

Before you arrive at the location make sure there is enough power to accommodate your equipment. Arrange your equipment, storage, and preparation areas to avoid the potential for cross contamination. Remember to keep the garbage areas as far away from the food preparation area as possible. Lastly, if you are just dropping off the order consider leaving food safety instructions for the customer advising them how to properly handle and store the food.

Pathogen Spotlight: *Clostridium perfringens*

Clostridium perfringens is nicknamed the *"cafeteria bug"* because outbreaks are usually linked to institutions such as hospitals, school cafeterias, prisons, and nursing homes. *C. perfringens* typically causes illness when foods are prepared in large quantities and then served after being kept warm at improper storage temperatures. Understanding and practicing proper holding procedures is critical for all food handlers, especially since *C. perfringens* is an ever present concern for the institutional foodservice employee.

Clostridium perfringens thrives in high-protein foods of animal origin such as meat and meat products, stews, soups, and gravies. Cooking kills the *C. perfringens* cells that cause food poisoning; however, it does not necessarily kill the heat-resistant spores that can grow into new cells. Therefore, when cooked food is not promptly served or refrigerated, the spores can grow to high, dangerous numbers. Because *C. perfringens* thrives in the "Danger Zone" (40-140˚F), cooked food must be chilled rapidly to 41°F or less, or kept at hot holding temperatures of 140°F or higher to prevent the activation and growth of harmful spores. When cooling large portions of cooked meat, gravies, stews and other foods commonly associated with *C. perfringens*, the food must be cooled within 2 hours from 140°F to 70° F, and within 6 hours from the initial 140°F to 41°F. To facilitate faster cooling, large batches should be separated into smaller portions, such as pans with a food height of no more than four inches.

Clostridium perfringens



References

Schneider KR, Goodrich-Schneider R, Hubbard MA, and Sampath DM. Institute of Food and Agricultural Sciences; University of Florida. Preventing Foodborne Illness Associated with *Clostridium perfringens* 2010. Internet: http://edis.ifas.ufl.edu/pdffiles/FS/FS10100.pdf.

U.S. Department of Health & Human Services. FoodSafety.gov. Clostridium perfringens. Internet: http://www.foodsafety.gov/poisoning/causes/bacteriaviruses/cperfringens/

Japanese Steakhouse, Holland, MI. — April 2014

The outbreak at the Japanese Steakhouse Bar & Grill was caused by norovirus. At least 300 people have been sickened in this outbreak. Public health officials in Michigan are waiting for laboratory results to determine whether the cause was a sick employee, contaminated food, or another cause. A questionnaire was posted online for patrons of the restaurant to fill out. That was helpful to the data collection phase of the investigation. The restaurant has been disinfected, including cleaning of equipment, floors, walls, and ceilings. Management has written new policies and procedures and retrained staff on the proper use of handwashing equipment, reporting illness, and food preparation. Norovirus is highly contagious and can be transmitted through food and drink, and through contact with contaminated surfaces. The symptoms of a norovirus infection include nausea, diarrhea, vomiting, abdominal pain, headache, and low fever. The symptoms usually begin 12 to 36 hours after exposure and last for a few days. Most patients recover without medical intervention, but some people can become dehydrated and must be hospitalized.

http://foodpoisoningbulletin.com

Market, Sacramento, CA. — March 2014

This market style restaurant was closed for nine days by the Sacramento County Environmental Health Management Department. The facility was cited for improper holding temperatures for the hot and cold potentially hazardous food, food was not safe and in good condition, and the presence of pests were observed at the time of the inspection. Management of the restaurant was given time to correct the above mentioned items and was allowed to re-open nine days later.

http://www.emd.saccounty.net

Hot Dog Restaurant, Seattle, WA. — March 2014

The hot dog restaurant was closed by the King County Health Department two times in the same day. The restaurant was cited for handwashing facilities that were not working, an imminent health hazard for no water available onsite at the time of the inspection, interference with a King County Health Department inspector, and failing to comply with a closure notice. The restaurant has remained closed as of March 31, 2014.

http://www.yelp.com

University, Johnstown, PA. — March 2014

A norovirus outbreak at the University at Johnstown over the weekend forced cancellation of all indoor social events and the cancellation of cafeteria services at all campus dining facilities. Students are experiencing symptoms of chills, nausea, vomiting, diarrhea, and abdominal cramps. The University offered prepackaged meals to students. The Wellness Center was closed, and custodial staff cleaned buildings on campus with EPA recommended products before classes resumed. The illness is believed to be norovirus, according to the Pennsylvania Department of Health. Norovirus is a highly contagious illness that is the leading cause of gastroenteritis in the United States. In addition to the symptoms listed above, anyone sickened by the virus can have muscle aches, tiredness, and low-grade fever. Onset is sudden, although most people recover after 48 hours. The virus is easily spread person-to-person, especially in the winter months when more people are indoors.

http://foodpoisoningbulletin.com

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