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No Reservations

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

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Washing Produce Prior to Preparation & Service

It has been noted that the restaurant/food service industry doesn't receive many days off. It is common for these facilities to remain open six to seven days a week and stay open for the holidays as well. That said, staff, managers, general managers, etc. have to be ready for many different types of situations. Of particular importance are food safety issues that may lead to foodborne illnesses. This concern is on the mind of every owner/operator on a daily basis. They confront this challenge with thorough planning and training of their staff in sound food safety techniques and procedures.

The concern of food safety issues are not limited to the facility itself, but the food provided from reputable suppliers as well. Even in the best of times mistakes still occur, but with sound food safety procedures in place at the retail level those potential issues can be controlled or even eliminated. An example of this is the recent multi-state outbreak of Salmonella poona associated with cucumbers. A lot of policies and procedures are put in place to prevent these types of issues, but unfortunately they still occur. That is why owners/operators have to be on top of their food safety programs.

Naturally, when a product is recalled, the regulatory community and the food industry go to great lengths to retrieve the affected product so it doesn't injure or cause an illness or death to any person. Unfortunately, this information does not always present itself before consumers are exposed to the affected product. This is why restaurants/foodservice facilities must be extra diligent on enforcing their food safety procedures on a daily basis.

That said, the food code requires that all produce be washed prior to preparation and service. In many instances, produce does not go through a cooking (kill) step and pathogens (e.g. bacteria, viruses, parasites, etc.) and/or contaminates that may be present on the produce can cause an illness or death. Washing produce prior to preparation and service provides an opportunity to remove a pathogen/contaminate.

Food safety programs recommend that you do not wash the produce prior to storage because it promotes the growth of mold. It is recommended that the produce be washed thoroughly under running potable water to remove dirt and other contaminates before cutting, cooking, or combing with other ingredients. The water should be slightly warmer than the temperature of the produce. Leafy greens, like lettuce and spinach, require extra attention. The outer leaves should be removed and the inner leaves pulled apart and rinsed thoroughly. When soaking or storing produce in standing water or an ice-water bath, do not mix different items or multiple batches of the same item. Pathogens from contaminated produce can contaminate the water and ice and spread to other produce. Be sure to clean and sanitize surfaces that were used to prepare produce items for washing. This also highlights another area of concern for cross contamination. The boxes and/or containers used to store produce may be contaminated, and therefore must not be placed on food preparation surfaces (e.g. cutting boards & preparation tables).

In summary, running and managing a restaurant/foodservice facility and protecting it from potential foodborne illness is a non-stop job and requires thoughtful planning, preparation, training, supervision, and communication. That way you are prepared for the risks that are associated with the food industry.

Source: ServSafe™NRA Educational Foundation

Pathogen Spotlight: Salmonella

Salmonella spp.: Onsite time: 1 to 3 days, Duration of illness: 4 to 7 days

Food most commonly associated with the pathogen is poultry, eggs, dairy products and beef that are contaminated with the bacteria. It has also been found in RTE food such as produce that has come in contact with these animals or their waste.



The symptoms associated with Salmonellosis are diarrhea, abdominal cramps, vomiting, and fever.

The critical prevention measures are to reduce the bacteria in the food through cooking, especially poultry, to the required minimum internal temperatures (165°F for 15 seconds), and to prevent the transfer of the bacteria to food through cross contamination between raw poultry and ready-to-eat (RTE) food. Food handlers diagnosed with Salmonellosis must be excluded from working in the establishment.



Note: Salmonella spp. is among the top five pathogens contributing to domestically acquired foodborne illness resulting in death. ***CDC, 2011 Estimates of Foodborne Illness in the United States***

Washington, D.C. September 2015

At least four people are sick after eating at the D.C. upscale restaurant & bar serving seasonal Mediterranean fare prepared with flavored olive oils, reports the Washington Post.

The D.C. Department of Health has suspended operations at the restaurant while they try to determine the source of an outbreak that has hospitalized at least four people with symptoms similar to *Salmonella* illness. The health department has identified 20 possible cases, but only two have been confirmed.

"We have retained third-party consultants to provide assistance in this investigation and will cooperate fully with the Department of Health," read a statement released by Fig & Olive. "We will continue to work with the DOH to insure that we have done all we can for the safety of our customers."

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CDC Update for Salmonella Multi-State Outbreak September 2015

Update: The Centers for Disease Control & Prevention (CDC) updated this outbreak on Wednesday, Sept. 9. There are now two deaths, 70 hospitalizations and 341 confirmed cases being reported in 30 states. The deaths being reported are in California and Texas (one each). That is 56 more confirmed cases since CDC's Sept. 4 update.

The Sept. 9 CDC update included this information:

- 53 percent those sickened are children younger than 18 years.
- Epidemiologic, laboratory, and traceback investigations have identified imported cucumbers from Mexico and distributed by Andrew & Williamson Fresh Produce as a likely source of the infections in this outbreak.

o 91 (68 percent) of 134 people interviewed reported eating cucumbers in the week before their illness began.

o Eleven illness clusters have been identified in seven states. In all of these clusters, interviews found that cucumbers were a food item eaten in common by ill people.

o Arizona, California, Montana, and Nevada isolated *Salmonella* from samples of cucumbers collected from various locations that were distributed by Andrew & Williamson Fresh Produce.

o On Sept. 4, 2015, Andrew & Williamson Fresh Produce voluntarily recalled all cucumbers sold under the "Limited Edition" brand label during the period from Aug. 1, 2015, through Sept. 3, 2015, because they may be contaminated with *Salmonella*.

✦ The type of cucumber is often referred to as a "slicer" or "American" cucumber and is dark green in color. Typical length is 7 to 10 inches. In retail locations, the cucumbers are typically sold in a bulk display without any individual packaging or plastic wrapping.

✦ Limited Edition cucumbers were distributed in the states of Alaska, Arizona, Arkansas, California, Colorado, Florida, Idaho, Illinois, Kansas, Kentucky, Louisiana, Minnesota, Mississippi, Montana, Nevada, New Jersey, New Mexico, Oklahoma, Oregon, South Carolina, Texas, and Utah. Further distribution to other states may have occurred.

✦ Consumers should not eat, restaurants should not serve, and retailers should not sell recalled cucumbers.

If you aren't sure if your cucumbers were recalled, ask the place of purchase or your supplier. When in doubt, don't eat, sell, or serve them and throw them out.

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