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No Reservations

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

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Avoid a Situation For Cross Contamination

By definition, cross-contamination occurs when a microorganism moves from one food or surface to another. Unfortunately, some foodservice employees may falsely believe that simply using clean equipment between tasks eliminates the risk of cross-contamination. However, cross-contamination can happen at any stage of the food preparation process and anywhere food travels through your establishment. For example, while an employee may be careful not to store ready-to-eat food under raw beef in the cooler, he or she may not think twice about using a contaminated cleaning towel to wipe a food contact surface. Or, perhaps a food handler understands the importance of good personal hygiene but does not wash his/her hands between answering a phone call and cutting a customer's sandwich. Obviously, even momentary lapses in safe food-handling practices could inadvertently allow pathogens to contaminate an otherwise safe food.

Cross-contamination can occur in three ways: food to food, equipment to food, and people to food. To reduce the risk of cross-contamination in your establishment consider some of the following recommendations: keep foods separate in the kitchen by creating color-coded work zones or using color-coded equipment; display food safety information throughout the kitchen to remind employees about handling foods safely; encourage sick employees to stay home or assign them to tasks that do not require food contact; prep raw animal products and ready-to-eat foods at different times and/or use pre-cut ingredients whenever possible; reinforce the importance of proper hand hygiene; and, continually evaluate your Sanitation Standard Operating Procedures (SSOPs) to ensure they are appropriate for your kitchen design and workflow.

Research suggests that cross-contamination is more likely to occur when multiple food handlers work on the same meal and/or use common equipment (1). Therefore, experts suggest that the prevalence of cross-contamination could be reduced if food handlers in multi-user environments view themselves as part of team (1). As such, consider ways to create a team environment and make sure all employees understand how contaminants are transferred to food and how they can control or eliminate the hazard of cross-contamination.

Environmental Contaminants & Cross Contamination

Maintaining a clean and sanitary environment is critical for protecting food and food contact surfaces from cross-contamination. It is important to be aware of the unique sanitation issues of your facility and create a comprehensive cleaning program that produces effective and consistent results. To increase the chances that your plan will be a success, perhaps have a kickoff meeting to introduce and explain the program to your employees. To sustain the momentum, provide feedback and encouragement and make sure they always have the proper tools, cleaning supplies, and protective equipment.

In addition to maintaining a clean environment, perform regular kitchen inspections to identify any structural problems that could compromise the safety of food. Make sure food and food contact surfaces are always protected from condensation, dirt, water, or debris from overhead fixtures, damaged ceilings, or vents. Inspect dishwashing machines daily to ensure they are clean and working properly. Also, frequently check plumbing and ventilation systems for signs of leaks or backups.

Help your establishment succeed and protect the health of your patrons by evaluating the environmental factors that could contribute to or prevent a foodborne illness caused by cross-contamination.

Source: Chapman, B, T. Eversley, D. Fillion, T. MacLaurin and D. Powell. 2010. Assessment of food safety practices of food service food handlers (risk assessment data): Testing of a communication intervention (evaluation of tools). *J Food Prot* 73(6):1101–1107.

Mexican Restaurant, Kansas City, MO. November 2012

The Kansas City Health Department has closed a westside restaurant after a health inspector found a fully intact dead buck inside a basement freezer. The restaurant cannot reopen until the restaurant owner meets with health inspectors to work out concerns. The owner told KCTV5's Emily Rittman that a customer on Thursday asked to put a deer in the basement freezer for a few hours. By Friday, the customer had not picked up the deer but a health inspector came by at 12:45 p.m. Friday and undertook a 2 1/2 hour inspection.

An employee told the health inspector that ice was normally stored inside that freezer. The owner said he is working to prove the deer was killed legally and was not contaminated. He said the deer will go to a processor. He stressed that the dead deer never came in contact with food. "All of the time it was in the freezer in the basement," The owner said.

Out of an abundance of caution, the owner said he will dispose of the freezer. In addition to the dead deer, the health inspector found numerous other issues. Those issues included employees not properly washing their hands and one employee preparing tamales with bare hands rather than using a glove. Raw meat, cheese, sour cream and salsa were also not property stored. Dead and live roaches were seen in the basement.

The health department came back on Monday to re-inspect the restaurant, but didn't reopen it because of concerns that the deer had not been properly disposed of. They also want to make sure there was no cross contamination between the deer and food served to the public. The health department is requiring written proof that a professional disposal company removes the deer and disposes of it rather than the owner just giving the deer away. The owner said he is working hard to get all the issues corrected because he said his family and his employees depend on the restaurant for their livelihood. He said employees won't be paid while the restaurant is closed. He said he appreciates his faithful customers and promised to get the restaurant reopened as soon as possible. "We're not hiding anything. We are still here and we hope we can see them (customers) as soon as they give us the OK," the owner said. The restaurant was re-inspected on Tuesday and was allowed to re-open.

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Asian Restaurant, Pomona, CA. November 2012

The Asian restaurant was closed on November 6, 2012. The restaurant was closed due to an infestation of vermin. The restaurant's permit was re-instated on November 8, 2012.

http://publichealth.lacounty.gov/phcommon/public/eh/closure/restall1.cfm

Petting Zoo, Longview, WA. November 2012

The Oregonian reports that a petting zoo and pumpkin patch in Longview, WA has been linked to an outbreak of at least 10 cases of E. coli illnesses. The petting zoo has shut down and is not planning to re-open.

Hamburger Franchise, Bloomington, IL. November 2012

The Illinois Dept. of Public Health and the McLean County Health Department are investigating a cluster of instances of *Salmonella Stanley* infections among individuals who reported eating at a variety of restaurants in Central Illinois from October 18th through November 11th. Transmission appears to be due to human contact, and the cases may be connected to a Nationwide hamburger franchise on South Main Street, Bloomington. The franchise owners have temporarily closed this location, and employees of the location are being tested for *Salmonella* carriage.

eFoodAlert

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