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Safe Food Handling Guidelines



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Person in Charge (PIC)

A PIC must be present during all hours of operation to ensure that safe food handling is being practiced by employees. The person in charge must be able to demonstrate safe food handling practices and principles. This can be done in three ways:

1. If the facility is in compliance with the Food Code.
2. Responding correctly to questions.
3. Being a Certified Food Protection Manager through an accredited program.

All employees must be trained in safe food handling practices and must have a valid food service worker's card that shall be posted at the food establishment. Unnecessary persons are not allowed in food preparation areas.

Hand Washing Procedures

Lather hands and exposed portions of arms. Vigorously rub together for at least 20 seconds paying particular attention to areas underneath fingernails and between fingers. Rinse with clean water. Dry thoroughly with single service paper towel or hand blow dryer. Cloth multi-use towels spread bacteria and cannot be used.

When to Wash Hands

Always wash hands before beginning work or when changing tasks; after using the toilet room; when soiled or contaminated; after touching bare human body parts (except clean hands and arms); before putting on gloves; when switching between raw and ready to eat food; after coughing, sneezing, using a tissue or tobacco; eating or drinking; after handling soiled equipment or utensils; or after engaging in other activities that contaminate the hands.

Where to Wash Hands

Use hand washing sink only. DO NOT wash hands in food prep sink, utensil washing sink, service sink or mop sink.

Gloves

The regulations state that "food shall be prepared with the least possible manual contact, with approved utensils..." This applies mainly to ready to eat foods, which require no further preparation. If you must use your hands to prepare ready to eat foods, then gloves must be worn to prevent bare hand contact. Single-use gloves shall be used for only one task, used for no other purpose, and discarded when damaged, soiled, or when interruptions occur in the operation. *Hand washing is still required and necessary to prevent food contamination.*

Fingernails

Keep fingernails trimmed, filed, and maintained so edges and surfaces are cleanable and not rough. No fingernail polish or artificial fingernails when working with exposed food, unless wearing intact gloves in good repair.

Jewelry

No jewelry on hands or arms except plain ring such as wedding band.

Eating, Drinking, Using Tobacco

Only in designated areas. Exception: Closed container, with lid and straw, allowed if handed to prevent contamination of employee's hands, the container, exposed food, equipment, utensils, linens and single service articles.

Hair Restraints

Food employees shall wear hair restraints (hats, hair coverings or nets, beard restraints, clothing that covers body hair, etc.) Exception: Does not apply to counter staff who only serve beverages and wrapped foods, or to hostesses and wait staff if they present a minimal risk of contaminating exposed food, equipment, utensils, linens and single service articles.

Storage of In-Use Utensils

During pauses in food preparation and dispensing, utensils shall be stored:

1. In the food with the handles above the top of the hood and the container;
2. In non-potentially hazardous food, with handles above the top of food within containers that can be closed, such as bins of sugar, flour, cinnamon, etc.
3. On clean portion of prep table or cooking equipment that are cleaned and sanitized as required;
4. In running water for moist food such as ice cream or mash potatoes;
5. In a clean, protected location for non-potentially hazardous food, such as ice scoops;
6. In a container of hot water at 135°F or above; container must be cleaned regularly, at least every 24 hours.

Protect Food from Cross Contamination

In order to protect food from cross-contamination: separate raw animal foods from raw and cooked ready-to-eat foods; separate unwashed fruits and vegetables from ready-to-eat foods; separate different types of raw meat from each other; clean and sanitize utensils at least every four hours; clean the outside of packages of any visible soil prior to opening; protect sealed containers from damage; store damaged, spoiled or recalled food away from other foods; and keep foods protected by covering, wrapping, sealing or other means. The bottoms of containers and packages from the floor must be cleaned prior to placing in contact with clean items such as counter tops.

Special Requirements for Highly Susceptible Populations

- The following may not be served or offered for sale: Unpasteurized prepackaged juice or beverage containing juice; raw or partially cooked animal foods (meats, eggs, etc., including meringue made from unpasteurized eggs); raw seed sprouts.
- Food in unopened original containers may not be served (includes condiments)
- Time may not be used as a public health control for raw eggs.
- Pasteurized eggs & egg products shall be substituted for raw shell eggs in the preparation of: Ready-to-Eat (RTE) or partially cooked foods such as Caesar salad, hollandaise sauce and egg nog; recipes in which more than one egg is broken and combined except when combined immediately before cooking for one consumer's serving, such as scrambled eggs (no holding time permitted), or when combined as an ingredient before baking and the eggs are thoroughly cooked, such as cake or muffin, or when preparation is conducted under a HACCP plan per 3-801.11 (E)(3).

Contaminated Foods

When in doubt throw it out! Foods that are suspected of being contaminated must not be served and discarded.

CLEANING AND SANITIZING

- Manual Dishwashing in a Three-Compartment Sink
- Pre-scrape and rinse or wipe the dishes.
- Wash in the first compartment with hot soapy water.
- Rinse with clean water.

- Sanitize for 30 seconds in a solution of one half to one teaspoon of bleach per gallon of cool water. Other methods of sanitizing are available such as quaternary ammonium and iodine. For specifics on concentrations please ask the County Sanitarian or refer to the West Virginia Food Code.
- Air dry the dishes on a drain board or wire rack. Towel drying is not allowed.

Dishwashers

There are two ways to sanitize:

1. When sanitizing with heat, the utensil surface must reach a temperature of 160° or the final rinse gauge should read at least 175°.
2. When using a sanitizing agent, the agent is automatically added during the final rinse and must be checked often with chlorine test strips.

Regardless of which method is used, it must be checked daily.

Equipment Food Contact Surfaces and Utensils

When the following occurs, the food contact surface must be washed, rinsed, and sanitized:

- Each time there is a change from working with raw foods to ready to eat foods;
- Between use with raw fruits and vegetables and with potentially hazardous food;
- Before using or storing food thermometers;
- Any time when contamination may have occurred; and
- When switching between different types of meat.

Utensils that are in continuous use with potentially hazardous foods must be cleaned or replaced at least every four (4) hours.

Wiping Cloths

If cloths are wet, they must be stored in a sanitizing solution (one teaspoon bleach per gallon of water). The sanitizer must be changed when food particles and visible soil are present. Dry or wet cloths used with raw animal foods (meats, eggs, etc.) shall be used only for the purpose and shall be kept separate from cloths used for other purposes.

Food-Contact Surfaces

A food contact surface that is reusable shall be smooth, free of ledges, cracks, deep seams, or other imperfections that would make the surface difficult to clean and sanitize.

Cookware and Utensil Limitations

- Cast iron may be used as a cooking surface or serving utensils but may not be used to store food because the cast iron will rust and leach iron into the food. Galvanized metal, copper, and brass should not be used with acidic foods.
- Wood may be used if it is hard maple or equally hard wood. If and when the wood becomes deeply scored or cracked making it difficult to clean and sanitize, it must be resurfaced or discarded.
- Non-stick coating such as Teflon or other similar coatings may be used as long as they are maintained in good condition (not scratched or scored) and do not cause the coating to chip into the food.

Food Sources

Food served or sold in a permitted food establishment must come from an approved source that is inspected and labeled as having been inspected. Home-cooked, packaged, canned, or otherwise processed foods are not approved.

Potentially Hazardous Foods

Potentially hazardous foods require temperature controls because they support the growth of large numbers of bacteria or other microorganisms. These foods include foods of animal origin such as meats, eggs, dairy products; plant foods (vegetables, etc.) once they are cooked; raw seed sprouts; cut melons; and garlic-in-oil mixtures unless processed or packaged to prevent the growth of harmful bacteria.

Ready to Eat Foods

Ready-to-eat food is food that is in a form that is edible without washing, cooking, or additional preparation by the food establishment or the consumer, and is reasonably expected to be consumed in that form.

Date Marking

Food that is potentially hazardous and ready to eat must be date marked at the time of preparation or the opening of the commercially sealed package if that food is going to be refrigerated for more than 24 hours.

Cooking Temperatures

Poultry - 165° for 15 seconds.

Microwave Cooking of raw animal foods - 165° stirred and rotated then, holds 2 minutes before serving

Ground Meats - 155° for 15 seconds

Eggs for hot holding and Eggs for immediate service - 145° for 15 seconds.

For a comprehensive list of cooking temperatures and times, ask the Sanitarian.

Hot and Cold Holding Temperatures

Cold holding must be less than 41°.

Hot holding must be 135° or above.

Temperature Danger Zone

If potentially hazardous and ready-to-eat food is stored between 41° F and 135° F, it can become unsafe to eat due to the rapid growth of bacteria. Unsafe foods must be discarded. It is important to use food thermometers to verify temperatures.

Reheating for Hot Holding

When reheating food, first heat rapidly to at least 165° F, then place in a hot holding unit and maintain at 135° F or above. Do not place cold foods directly in the hot holding unit because they will be in the danger zone for too long.

Cooling of Foods to be Stored for Reuse

Large quantities of food can take a long time to cool down to refrigeration temperature. To keep these foods safe, they must be rapidly cooled by one or more of the following methods: Use containers that quickly transfer heat such as glass, metal or ceramic; set food container in ice water, and then stir the food frequently while cooling; separate into smaller portions; place food in shallow pans; use rapid cooling equipment; or add ice as an ingredient.

Cooling Guidelines: *135°F cooled to 70°F within two (2) hours,
70°F to 41°F within 4 hours*

Thawing Methods

Food may be thawed: In the refrigerator; as part of the cooking process; in a microwave, just before regular cooking methods; or submerged under running water less than 71°F, 41°F for ready-to-eat-foods and not for longer than four (4) hours. Do not thaw foods by leaving them out at room temperature or just sitting in water.

Sponges can harbor bacteria and are very difficult to clean once in use. Sponges may not be used in contact with food or cleaned and sanitized surfaces and utensils.

Lead Limitations: If you believe cookware or utensils might contain lead, contact the Sanitarian about acceptable levels.

Chemicals and Toxins

Bleach, soap, cleaners drain openers and similar items must be stored separate from food and food contact surfaces. Store in such a way that they cannot drip, spray, splash or spill onto food, utensils, linens, and single use/service articles.

Thermometers

Thermometers shall be provided and kept on hand to routinely monitor the temperature of hot and cold foods. Improper holding temperature is the leading cause of food borne illness. Routine monitoring of temperatures will greatly reduce the chance of causing a food borne illness.

Refrigerators must have a thermometer mounted in the warmest part of the refrigerator and where it is easily readable. Maintaining a daily temperature log is a good practice.

DISEASES

The Big Four: Typhoid Fever, Shigellosis, E. Coli, and Hepatitis A can all be spread rapidly through a community by improper handling of food and poor sanitation. These diseases are life threatening especially in the young and old.

Symptoms: diarrhea, fever, vomiting, jaundice or sore throat with a fever. Employees must report these symptoms to the person in charge.

“Exclude” means to keep out of the food establishment. Employees that are diagnosed by a doctor as having one of the Big Four must be excluded.

“Restrict” means to prevent a food employee from working with exposed food, clean equipment, utensils, linens and unwrapped single service/use articles. Employees experiencing symptoms must be restricted.

Other restrictions include an exposed lesion, boil, or wound containing pus or that is open and draining, or persistent sneezing, coughing or runny nose.

Highly Susceptible Population Facilities such as nursing homes, hospitals, and daycare centers are subject to greater exclusions and restrictions and employees should ask the sanitarian or their supervisor for more information.

Note: This study guide is a summary of safe food practices in the 2005 West Virginia Food Code. It is hoped that this simplified version is more easily understood by the average reader. This is by no means a complete guide to food safety. Refer to the West Virginia Food Code or ask a sanitarian for more detailed information.