



Restaurant Foodborne Illness Prevention

An instance of foodborne illness can be costly for your restaurant. From lost revenue to potential lawsuits and legal fees, it pays to focus on food safety and outbreak prevention. Are you doing everything you can to prevent a potential outbreak? Implementing proper control measures can help you avoid damage to your restaurant's reputation and the costs associated with a foodborne outbreak.

Encourage Frequent Handwashing

Proper handwashing is necessary to reduce instances of foodborne outbreaks. The U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA) recommends washing hands after:

- Eating
- Drinking
- Smoking or using chewing tobacco
- Coughing
- Sneezing
- Using a tissue
- Preparing raw animal products
- Handling dirty equipment
- Touching the body (e.g., scratching your nose)

Handwashing may not be enough to stop the spread of pathogens. The FDA recommends using gloves when preparing food, in addition to washing your hands.

Avoid Cross Contamination

Cross contamination in restaurants occurs when pathogens travel from one location to another. This can happen when a worker handles tainted meat and then touches another ingredient or surface. To keep your patrons and employees safe, follow these guidelines:

- Do not let ready-to-eat food touch surfaces that have come in contact with raw meat, poultry or seafood



- Use separate cutting boards and utensils for meat, vegetables and dairy prep
- Clean and sanitize the food-prep sink, work areas, all equipment and utensils before starting food prep
- Wash all produce in warm running water
- Designate handwashing sinks for employees that are separate from the food-preparation sinks
- Cover or wrap all food before storing

Train Your Staff

Make sure your staff understands how to prevent the spread of foodborne illnesses. Your staff should be trained on the importance of handwashing, cooking food to the proper temperatures, and how to clean and sanitize surfaces. Proper holding and cooling temperatures should be available for all refrigerated or frozen ingredients and prepared food.

Employees should not be allowed to prepare or handle food if they have been sick in the last 48 hours. Require all your employees to take food safety training, such as those offered through ServSafe®. Be sure to also check with your local and state health departments for any region-specific food safety regulations.

Clean, Sanitize and Disinfect

Familiarize yourself with the differences between cleaning, sanitizing and disinfecting.

Cleaning is wiping down surfaces with soap or a detergent to remove stains, dirt and debris. While simply cleaning the surfaces in your restaurant is not enough, you must remove the surface-level dirt and debris before you can get to the next step of sanitizing.

Sanitizing surfaces in your restaurant means removing microbes and killing bacteria. This can be done by leaving a chemical agent on a surface for a short period of time, allowing it to eliminate any bacteria. Sanitizing chemicals must be used according to the manufacturer's instructions to be effective.

Disinfecting a surface requires killing both bacteria and viruses. This is done by using chemical disinfectants that are left on a surface for a longer period, typically 10 minutes. While you may not need to use disinfecting sprays in your kitchen or on restaurant tables, they should be used in bathrooms.

Restaurant Management

Provide menu warnings for any food that is served below the recommended internal temperature, such as oysters or certain fish. Make sure to also provide allergen information to patrons, especially if there is a chance for cross contamination. Keep an ingredient and food inventory log to track shelf lives, and provide cooking temperature instructions for all materials. Remember, management enforcement of your foodborne illness prevention policies is vital to get staff buy-in and to foster a safety mentality.

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EMC Insurance Companies
717 Mulberry Street
Des Moines, IA 50309
800-447-2295 • 515-280-2511

www.emcins.com
losscontrol@emcins.com



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