Most Common Food Safety Violations

The most common major risk factor violations that Central District Health Department Environmental Health Specialists observe while conducting food safety inspections are **#19: Cold Holding, #12: Food Surfaces Clean (Sanitizing), #7: Handwashing Facilities and #20: Date Marking.** When these major risk factors are not controlled, there is an increased risk of a foodborne illness outbreak. By having procedures in place that include monitoring and record keeping, we can prevent foodborne illness in the community.

Cold Holding violations are most common. Bacterial growth and toxin production can occur if time and temperature control are not monitored. The temperature danger zone is between 41°F and 135°F. Bacterial growth increases with an increase in time in this temperature zone.

What to do:

- Use a reliable and accurate thermometer to check the temperature of food that require temperature control for safety. This is a valuable tool to control this major risk factor.
- Monitor and record refrigeration equipment in several locations, especially a unit that is not consistent in keeping food 41°F and below.
- Monitor open tabletop preparation units. Equipment that meets NSF/ANSI Standard 7 after 1997 are designed to keep food in these units below 41°F. Even during busy times these units are designed to keep food cold if they are used according to the manufacturer's instructions. Designate an employee to monitor using an accurate thermometer to probe the internal temperature of food.

Food Surfaces Clean is the second most common violation.

What to do:

- Dishwashers not sanitizing is the most common observation. Daily monitoring of the sanitization rinse cycle in your machine will increase compliance with this requirement.
- Have a chart near your dishwashing machine where designated employees can record the sanitizing concentration or sanitization temperature.
- Have the correct sanitizer test papers or heat sensitive tape available. Your chemical supplier or dishwasher maintenance company will have these items or know how to obtain them.
- Follow the correct procedure to clean food contact surfaces.

Handwashing Facilities that are supplied with soap and paper towels will allow food service employees to wash their hands correctly.

What to do:

- Good handwashing practices will reduce the risk of food contamination that may cause a foodborne illness outbreak.
- Hand soap and paper towels must be at each handwash sink.
- Review your hand washing policy with employees and constantly remind your staff to wash their hands to reduce food safety risk for your customers.
- Designate certain staff to check the supply of soap and paper towels at the handwash sinks.

Date Marking is required for all Ready-to-Eat foods that require temperature control for safety (TCS) or are potentially hazardous. Seven days is the maximum number of days this type of food can be held in the refrigerator at 41°F or below.

What to do:

- Have a date marking system that employees understand.
- Be consistent in the application of your date marking system to prevent unsafe food from being served to a customer.
- Review the date marking rule in the Idaho Food Code 3–501.17. and 3–501.18.

Visit the CDHD website for posters and PDF-format forms that will be useful in your daily operations: www.cdhd.idaho.gov/eh/food/active.htm

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