

The Food Review

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Recent E.coli Outbreaks Involving Lettuce & Spinach

Within the last six months there have been two significant foodborne illness outbreaks in the U.S. linked to contaminated lettuce or spinach. Most recently 71 people became ill after eating lettuce served at Taco Bell restaurants in five Northeast states.

The E.coli outbreak in August and September was linked to spinach from a California grower. That outbreak infected 199 people in 28 states and left three dead.



What is The Food and Drug Administration doing to increase the safety of lettuce and other fresh produce?

The FDA developed the Lettuce Safety Initiative in response to recurring outbreaks of E. coli O157:H7 in lettuce. The primary goals of the initiative are:

- To reduce public health risks by focusing on the product, agents and areas of greatest concern
- To alert consumers early
- To respond rapidly in the event of an outbreak.

On August 24, 2006, the State of California Department of Health Services, the California Department of Food and Agriculture and the FDA met with industry and academia to further clarify the goals, objectives and next steps for the Lettuce Safety Initiative. The meeting was facilitated by the Western Institute for Food Safety and Security. The initiative is based on the 2004 Produce Safety Action Plan, intended to minimize the incidence of food borne illness associated with the consumption of fresh produce.

FDA is considering a variety of options to increase the safety of all fresh produce marketed in the United States. The agency will hold a public hearing on the issue in early 2007.

Resources: Lettuce Safety Initiative: <http://www.cfsan.fda.gov/~dms/lettsafe.html>
Produce Safety Action Plan: <http://www.cfsan.fda.gov/~dms/prodpla2.html>

Food Review is sent quarterly, free of charge to all licensed food establishments in our health district. We hope to include news of interest and importance. Topic ideas or articles written by the readers are welcome to be sent to: Editor, Food Review, CDHD, 707 N. Armstrong Pl., Boise, ID 83704. Extra copies of the newsletter are available at your local Health Department office.

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Listeriosis

Date Marking Ready-to-Eat Food Section 3-501.17 of the Idaho Food Code

The culprits are *Listeria monocytogenes* (LM) and *Yersinia Enterocolitica* (YE) and that is why date marking is so very important. *Listeria monocytogenes* is a mouthful so we will just call it "LM". LM is typically found in soft cheeses, lunchmeats and hot dogs, however it is everywhere in our environment and very difficult to eliminate. LM has also been implicated in outbreaks in raw milk, ice cream, raw meats, and ready-to-eat meat and cheese products. According to the Centers for Disease Control, Listeriosis, the illness from LM affects 2500 persons each year and kills about 500 of its victims. The bacteria are mainly transmitted to humans by food.

LM grows best at temperatures between 86°F-100°F, however growth at 37° and as high as 104°F have been recorded. So, while refrigerating food products will slow bacteria growth, it doesn't stop it. The longer they are in the refrigerator the more time the bacteria have to grow and increase in number. Date marking requirements, with time and temperature limits, are set to prevent growth and limit the number of cold-growing bacteria.

Foods that are at higher risk of contamination are deli meats, soft cheese, deli salads as well as those foods with high incidence of illness due to post-process contamination including frankfurters, pasteurized mild and mold-ripened cheese.

The Idaho Food Code specifies that ready-to-eat potentially hazardous food prepared and held refrigerated for more than 24 hours in a food establishment must be marked at the time of preparation to indicate the date by which the food shall be consumed or discarded. The same rule applies for refrigerated, ready-to-eat, potentially hazardous food prepared and packaged by a food processing plant. They must be marked with the time the original container or package is opened, and indicate the date by which the food should be consumed or discarded. The food must be consumed or discarded in seven days when held at 41°F or below.



When you practice first in-first out date marking of ready-to-eat potentially hazardous foods you limit the growth of bacteria that live and grow in cold environments. This is an active step you can take to reduce the prevalence of foodborne illness in your community.

Idaho Food Safety Exam Now Online

Let's say you're too busy to take one of the Idaho Food Safety and Sanitation classes offered by Central District Health, but you think you know your stuff. Well, you don't have to take the class to get the certification. Food service workers have always had the option to take the Idaho Food Safety Exam without taking the class. If they pass, they are certified for five years. Now taking the exam is easier than ever because it's online. Go to www.foodsafety.idaho.gov to learn more and to challenge your knowledge of food safety. You'll also find links to the Idaho Food Safety Manual, which you might want to study before taking the exam.

Employee Illness Reporting

Responsible food establishment operators should ask themselves this series of questions:

- Are you interested in preventing a foodborne illness in your establishment?
- Are you taking all the appropriate actions to prevent contamination of the food you serve to customers?
- Are you in the know concerning employee illnesses?
- Do you keep a log of employee illnesses?

Most of the foodborne illness investigations conducted by Central District Health over the last two years involved an employee that was ill while working.

Some organisms like norovirus are highly contagious and only a few virus particles are required to cause illness. Those particles can also remain on the food for days.

The **Employee Illness Log** is included in this publication for your use. Knowing who is ill, when they are ill, and recording the symptoms of illness, could save your business from a foodborne illness outbreak. If your employees are experiencing symptoms such as diarrhea, vomiting, fever or fever with sore throat, you need to know. These symptoms of illness could be an indication that the ill employee has a highly contagious disease that may make you, other employees and customers ill. Your quick action in preventing an employee from working with symptoms such as these will reduce the risk of foodborne illness.

We strongly encourage all food establishment managers and owners to use the Employee Illness Log. (**On Back**)

Be a proactive food establishment operator and be aware of symptoms of illness that may cause a foodborne illness. Restrict or exclude an employee from food service before a foodborne illness outbreak occurs in your establishment.

Food Service Employee Illnesses: When to Report

We wish to congratulate food service operators for keeping Central District Health Department informed when they have illness situations reported by customers or employees. Early interventions can keep the outbreak limited. Delayed reporting or interventions can allow the outbreak to spread and result in adverse publicity. Our health district has had large and small outbreaks, some local, and some national. Below are three illness-related questions employers ask.

Q. Do I have to report employee illnesses to Central District Health Department?

A. Yes. If an employee has certain, diagnosed illnesses or conditions in a communicable form, including diarrhea or vomiting, the person in charge of the eating or drinking establishment [or school or child care] must immediately notify Central District Health Department and obtain guidance on proper actions needed to protect the public. The ill employee shall not work as a food handler as long as the disease is in a communicable stage.

The diseases and conditions include, but are not limited to Campylobacteriosis, diarrhea, E. coli O157:H7, norovirus, Hepatitis A, skin infections, vomiting.

Q. During an outbreak investigation, do employees have to submit a stool (or other) specimen or submit to an examination?

A. Yes, if the investigator has reasonable cause to believe the food handler is afflicted with a disease listed in the administrative rule: Rules and Regulations Governing Idaho Reportable Diseases.

More diseases are on the website: <http://adm.idaho.gov/adminrules/rules/idapa16/0210.pdf>

Q. Will the employee be restricted from working?

A. Maybe. Depending on the illness, the employee may be allowed to return to work when feeling well, or may be required to submit further specimens for testing. Each disease has its own restriction protocol.

You may contact Bob Jue, REHS
for further information. 327-8523.

(please see Employee Illness Log on other side of this sheet.)

Serving Food at Special Events

Have you noticed the increase in special events and the increased number of food vendors? While these events bring people together for fun and good causes, food vendors need to be aware that their participation requires submission of a Temporary Food Establishment application at least two weeks in advance. Completing a Temporary Food Establishment application in advance allows our customer service representatives and health inspectors to review the application and menu items in an effective and timely manner. This applies to both indoor and outdoor events.

You can access the Temporary Food Establishment application on-line at <http://cdhd.idaho.gov/ehs/food.htm>. You will also find our Food Vendor packet for temporary food establishments at this site.

Food establishment owners and operators who do not have a Mobile Food Unit license must submit an application for each temporary special event they attend. This includes food establishment operators who are licensed as caterers. Licensed caterers serving food at public special events are serving food to an unknown number of customers for extended time periods. This is much different than serving one meal for a known number of people. Licensed caterers would need to obtain a Temporary Food Establishment permit when selling potentially hazardous foods, unless they have a Mobile Food Unit license.



Definitions according to the Idaho Food Code section 1-201(95):

A Temporary Food Establishment is:

A food establishment that operates for a period of no more than 14 consecutive days in conjunction with a single event or celebration. (Therefore an application is required for each event that you intend to serve food.)

A Food Establishment is:

An operation that is conducted in a mobile, stationary, temporary, or permanent facility or location; where consumption is on or off the premises and regardless whether or not there is a charge for the food.

Labeling Laws & Honest Presentation

According to the Idaho Food Code section 3-601.12 all labeled foods must be honestly presented:

Food shall be offered for human consumption in a way that does not mislead or misinform the consumer. The accuracy of the label is very important especially for people who may be allergic.

Food packaged in a food establishment shall be labeled as specified in law.

Idaho Food Code 3-602.11

Label information shall include:

- 1) The common name of the food, or absent the common name, an adequately descriptive identity statement
- 2) If made of two or more ingredients, a list of ingredients, in descending order of predominance by weight, including a declaration of artificial color or flavor and chemical preservatives, if contained in the food
- 3) An accurate declaration of the quantity of contents
- 4) The name and place of business of the manufacturer, packer, or distributor; and
- 5) Except as exempted in the Federal Food, Drug and Cosmetic Act 403 (Q)(3)-(5), nutrition labeling as specified in 21 CFR 101-Food Labeling and 9 CFR 317 Subpart B Nutrition Labeling



Section 3-701.11 of the Idaho Food Code addresses required action if food is deemed misbranded:

A food that is unsafe, adulterated, or not honestly presented as specified under 3-101.11 shall be reconditioned according to an approved procedure or discarded.

So what does this mean? You must have labels on foods that are self-serve packaged foods or bulk foods and your labels must have accurate information as described above.

Food Safety Classes At CDHD



The Central District Health Department offers two different courses in food safety, the 4-hour Idaho Food Safety & Sanitation course and the 8-hour ServSafe® Manager Certification course. The Idaho Food Safety course provides Idaho certification in food safety under the state's Food Protection Program and is good for five years. The ServSafe® Manager Certification course is designed to provide food service managers with the knowledge necessary to meet state and national standards. The ServSafe® certification is valid for five years and can be used anywhere in the United States. For more information and to register for either course call 327-7499.

Idaho Food Safety and Sanitation Course schedule:

February 7, 2007 1:00 – 5:00 p.m. – Central District Health, Boise

ServSafe® Manager Certification Course schedule:

February 13, 2007, 8:00 a.m. – 5:00 p.m. – Central District Health, Boise

February 28, 2007, 8:00 a.m. – 5:00 p.m. – McCall Memorial Hospital

(In McCall call 630-8001 for information and registration)

Note: All food safety certifications classes can be offered offsite with a group of 10 or more students. In Boise call 327-7499 and in McCall call 630-8001 for more information.