

**The Food Review**

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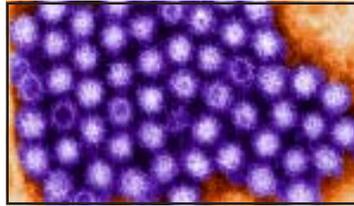
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**Norovirus Is Serious Business**



The headlines in the paper proclaimed a ‘stomach flu’ outbreak at Madison High School in Idaho Falls. Up to 15% of the student population, or 150 students, had called in sick for several days in early December with symptoms consistent with Norovirus.

Noroviruses (NoVs) are now recognized as the most frequent cause of infectious gastroenteritis and foodborne illness worldwide. Each year in the United States, there occur an estimated 23 million cases of NoV, of which approximately 40% are due to foodborne transmission. The illness begins after an incubation period of 12 to 48 hours and is typically characterized by acute-onset vomiting and/or diarrhea, which can be very debilitating and lead to dehydration. Most healthy individuals will recover after 1 to 3 days.

Noroviruses are transmitted by a variety of routes, including directly from person to person, via contaminated food or water and contamination of the environment. In the United States, NoVs are responsible for up to 50% of all foodborne gastroenteritis outbreaks and often involve ready-to-eat food items such as salads, sandwiches, or fresh produce. In most outbreaks, these items are assumed to be contaminated at point of service by a NoV-infected food worker, even in the absence of symptoms in these workers.



Control and prevention of norovirus outbreaks is challenging, due to the low infectious dose of the virus (10 to 100 particles), prolonged shedding (up to 2 to 3 weeks after recovery), environmental stability, and resistance to common disinfectants, freezing, drying, and low pH. Efforts to reduce norovirus infections should focus on education, hand hygiene, implementation of effective policies to exclude persons recovered from diarrheal illness for 48 hours after recovery (see Norovirus Exclusion on page 2), and appropriate disinfection using EPA- or CDC-recommended agents.

To kill NoVs in the home or kitchen, unscented household chlorine bleach is the most effective sanitizer. On hard, non-absorbent surfaces a dilution of 1/3 cup bleach per gallon of water will disinfect. If used on dishware, this concentration must be rinsed off with potable water and then sanitized again with 1 teaspoon of bleach per gallon of water. Of course, a hot water sanitizing rinse of 170°F in a sink or 180°F in a dish machine will kill the virus. Quaternary sanitizing agents have not been shown to be effective against NoVs.

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**We're A Tobacco Free Zone**



To protect the health of **everyone** at CDHD, no smoking or other tobacco use is permitted in our facilities or on our property, both indoors and out. **Thank you for your cooperation.**



*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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Quaternary ammonium compounds are often used for sanitizing food preparation surfaces or disinfecting large surfaces (e.g., countertops and floors). However, because NoVs are non-enveloped virus particles, most quaternary ammonium compounds (which act by disrupting viral envelopes) are not effective against them.

If NoVs are suspected in a food establishment environment it is extremely important for the manager to react quickly. Contact the health department and we will work with you to develop a plan of action. Doing so will not only ensure the health and safety of your patrons but protect your business.

## Norovirus Exclusion

The Idaho Food Code specifically requires employers to restrict and exclude food industry employees diagnosed with Norovirus until they are 48 hours without symptoms that may include diarrhea, vomiting or fever. This change in the Idaho Food Code occurred in April 2008.

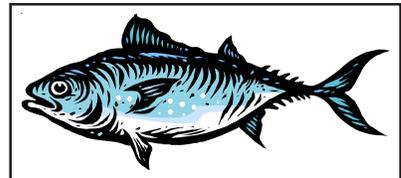
The new rule can be found in the Idaho Food Code:

IDAPA 16 TITLE 02 CHAPTER 19

### FOOD SAFETY AND SANITATION STANDARDS FOR FOOD ESTABLISHMENTS

## Suspected Scombroid Poisoning

It is suspected that a tuna dish served at a business luncheon in the United Kingdom caused 12 diners to experience intense headache, nausea, vomiting, facial flushing, and other symptoms. Scombroid poisoning is suspected. Scombroid fish poisoning occurs after eating fish with high levels of accumulated histamine or other biogenic amines.



Histamine is produced and can accumulate when bacterial enzymes metabolize naturally occurring histidine in fish. This most often occurs when fish is held at ambient or high temperatures (such as 70 - 90° F) for several hours, but can occur at more moderate temperatures (over 45° F). Rapid chilling of fish immediately after catch is the most effective measure to prevent scombroid fish poisoning.

Fish from the family Scombridae (such as tuna and mackerel) contain high levels of free histidine in muscle tissue and are the most common sources of scombroid fish poisoning, but other fish (such as mahi mahi, amberjack, bluefish, abalone, and sardines) also have been implicated.

Cooking fish containing the histamine-like substance will not remove or neutralize it. The preventive is to keep fish properly refrigerated at all times.



## Farewell Lochsa Man

Bob Mayer has retired from the health district to pursue a life of leisure, photography, and building an energy efficient home above the Lochsa River. Because of budget holdbacks his position will not be filled. To cover his area, the remaining staff have increased their workloads, and Jerry Davis will now have the 83709 zip code. To view all the staff and their assigned zip codes, you may go to the CDHD website. <http://cdhd.idaho.gov/EH/contacts/food.htm>

## Construction Reminder

Many food facilities are taking advantage of slower economic times to remodel or expand their facilities. It is required that remodels, new construction, or menu changes have the approval of the district health department before the change(s) occur. (Food Code Section 8-201.11). A major remodel requiring building permits may trigger a formal plan review with the health district with a requisite fee of \$105.

## Lead By Example - Win A Prize!

It should be no surprise to anyone that food service employees learn best by the example set by the Person In Charge (PIC). This is especially true when it comes to food safety practices.

Here are some examples of typical practices the PIC can demonstrate to his or her workers:

- Serve safe, contamination-free food
- Wash hands frequently and correctly
- Demonstrate the four-step process of cleaning kitchenware and utensils
- Use sanitizer test strips every day
- Positively reinforce safe food handling techniques
- No bare hand contact with ready-to-eat foods
- Monitoring safe food product temperatures
- Practicing efficient date marking



Do you lead by example in your kitchen? Is your teaching example effective? Then tell us about it and you could win free admission into one of the ServSafe® Certification classes offered by Central District Health Department – a value of \$95!

### Here's the Challenge

Tell the Central District Health Department how you incorporate food safety practices and risk factor reduction every day. Explain how these practices have helped your staff understand, practice and pass on to others the example you have set. A short paragraph or two about your method is all we need. Best practices will be featured in upcoming editions of the Food Review. Send your entry by March 31<sup>st</sup> to Tom Schmalz at [tschmalz@cdhd.idaho.gov](mailto:tschmalz@cdhd.idaho.gov), or mail your entry to Tom at this address:

Environmental Health  
Central District Health Department  
707 N Armstrong Place  
Boise, ID 83704

## Posting The Food Establishment Permit

### **Did you know that the Idaho Food Code requires that your permit be posted?**

Please post your Food Establishment permit in a location where it can be easily read by your customers. According to section 8-304.11 (A), it is the responsibility of the permit holder to post the permit in a location that is conspicuous to consumers. This includes mobile food establishments.

## Electronic Thermometers



### **Did you know that your hot foods have to be cooled quickly to prevent bacterial growth?**

Central District Health has electronic thermometers that log temperatures as the food cools. A graph print-out shows how the temperature changed over time. Rapid cooling methods are suggested in the Idaho Food Code section 3-501.15

If you are interested in borrowing an electronic thermometer, contact your health inspector.