



The Food Safety News Summer 2007

Whatcom County Health Department
Food Protection Program
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Enjoy the rebirth of the food safety news, back after a long vacation. Please use the information in this newsletter to improve safe food handling practices in your food establishment.

When Should I Wash My Hands?

The 2005 revision to the Retail Food Code outlines specific times when food workers must wash their hands. Some of these requirements are new to Washington State. Section 2-301.14 states that Food Employees must clean their hands:

- ✎ After touching bare human body parts other than clean hands and arms;
- ✎ After using the restroom;
- ✎ After caring for or handling service animals or aquatic animals;
- ✎ After coughing, sneezing, using a handkerchief or tissue, using tobacco or eating;
- ✎ After handling soiled equipment or utensils;
- ✎ During food preparation to prevent cross-contamination or when changing tasks;
- ✎ When switching from working with raw meat/seafood to working with ready to eat food;
- ✎ Before putting gloves on; and
- ✎ Any time your hands become contaminated.

Improper handwashing practices and bare hand contact with ready to eat foods are two of the most common factors contributing to foodborne illness outbreaks in Washington. They are also two of the most common violations we observe during routine inspections.

Rules for Molluscan Shellstock

Another violation commonly noted during routine inspections concerns molluscan shellstock storage and record keeping. **Molluscan shellstock include clams, mussels and oysters that are received and sold in the shell.** The term shellstock does not refer to crustaceans such as crab, prawns, lobster or shrimp.

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Molluscan shellstock present some unique illness risks, such as paralytic shellfish poisoning (red tide) and infection with bacteria such as Vibrio species. As a result, our Retail Food Code requires:

- ✎ All Molluscan shellstock to be obtained from approved commercial sources.
- ✎ All Molluscan shellstock to be accompanied by a certification tag from the time they are delivered to you until all of them have been sold or served.
- ✎ Food Establishment Operators to document the dates each batch of molluscan shellstock are sold. This can be done by writing sales dates on the certification tag for each batch.
- ✎ Food Establishment Operators to segregate different batches of molluscan shellfish from one another.
- ✎ Food Establishment Operators to inspect shellfish and remove individuals that are dead or have broken shells from each batch.
- ✎ Food Establishment Operators to maintain shellfish certification tags and sales records for molluscan shellstock for 90 days after the product is sold.

Molluscan shellstock record keeping is required to assure that shellfish are obtained from safe, approved sources. Accurate records also allow for rapid recall of any products that are implicated in illness outbreaks.



More about...Consumer Advisory

Raw meat, eggs and seafood are likely to be contaminated with bacteria, parasites and viruses that can cause foodborne illnesses in people. Most recipes require these foods to be thoroughly cooked, which destroys pathogens and leaves the food safe to consume.

However, some recipes may contain meat, seafood or eggs that are raw or undercooked. For example:

- ☞ Rare / Medium-Rare hamburger
- ☞ Fried eggs over easy or Sunny side up
- ☞ Sushi / Sashimi
- ☞ Oysters on the Half Shell
- ☞ Caesar salad dressing
- ☞ Chocolate Mousse (raw Egg White)
- ☞ Ceviche
- ☞ Carpaccio
- ☞ Steak Tartar

Consumption of these foods has been linked to illness outbreaks because they are not subjected to a thorough cooking step to destroy pathogens.

We recommend eliminating these items from your menu since they pose a greater risk of foodborne illness to all of your customers. Consider the following ideas:

- ☞ Use pasteurized liquid eggs in recipes that call for raw eggs.
- ☞ Substitute cooked meat, eggs and seafood in recipes that call for raw meat, eggs or seafood.
- ☞ Instruct your cooks and wait-staff to inform customers that all ground meat is thoroughly cooked... “We do not serve that item medium rare.”

...And Finally...

We often receive questions about what violations could result in the Health Department ordering a food establishment to close—we refer to this as permit suspension. Permit suspension is a rare occurrence and we work closely with operators to prevent such enforcement action.

Permit suspension may be ordered if an imminent health hazard is noted, such as:

- ☞ A documented outbreak of food-related illness
- ☞ A sewage spill or backup
- ☞ Loss of potable water supply
- ☞ Loss of hot water supply
- ☞ Repeated, serious Food Code violations

Serious Food Code violations, also known as red high risk factor violations, include food handling errors that could result in an illness outbreak, such as:

- ☞ Ill food workers
- ☞ Lack of hand washing
- ☞ Bare hand contact with ready to eat food
- ☞ Inadequate food temperature control
- ☞ Cross contamination
- ☞ Food obtained from unapproved sources

The document included with this newsletter outlines the most common inspection and enforcement procedures followed by our inspection staff. Our goal is to help you serve food safely without resorting to enforcement penalties. Permit suspension is used only in the case of an imminent health hazard or if other efforts fail to achieve code compliance. Please feel free to contact us if you have any questions about our enforcement policies.

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