The Quarterly Food Safety Newsletter of the Alexandria Health Department

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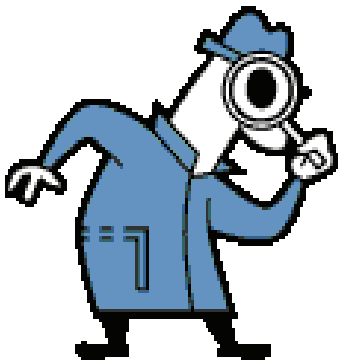
Shifting Inspection Focus

Beginning this fall, the Alexandria Health Department will be re-focusing food establishment inspections to evaluate control over foodborne illness risk factors and implementation of Food Code interventions. This shift is being initiated in response to recommendations and standards set forth by the U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA). Foodborne illness risk factors are the five most commonly reported behaviors that lead to the occurrence of foodborne illness outbreaks in food establishments. The risk factors are as follows: food from unsafe sources, improper holding temperatures, inadequate cooking, poor personal hygiene and contaminated equipment. There are also five key public health interventions that can reduce the risk of foodborne illness when implemented by a food establishment. These interventions are demonstration of knowledge, hands as a vehicle of contamination, employee health, time/temperature relationships, and consumer advisory.



During inspections, Environmental Health Specialists (EHS) will be evaluating all critical food preparation processes from receiving to service. Since many of these processes occur for a limited period of time, EHSs will need to ask operators about the processes that they are not able to observe such as receiving or cooling procedures. Other processes that will be assessed are hand-washing, thermometer calibration, thawing, cooking, cold-holding, hot-holding, and reheating. EHSs will also need to review records such as employee health policies, parasite destruction records, shellstock tags, food purchase invoices, pest control records, and cleaning records for grease traps or exhaust hoods. Our goal is to provide food establishments and the public with more in-depth evaluations of risk factors and interventions.

We recognize that food safety is a partnership. In order to develop this partnership, EHS will encourage the person-in-charge (PIC) to accompany him/her during the inspection. This will provide the PIC with the opportunity to ask questions, correct violations immediately, and develop compliance strategies with input from the EHS. This will also provide the EHS with the opportunity to ask questions to better understand his/her observations, assess the PIC's food safety knowledge, and provide training on an individual basis.

Food establishments should expect at least one routine inspection each year and several critical procedures or training inspections throughout the year. Routine inspections identify both critical and non-critical violations and may be pre-scheduled with the establishment. Critical procedures inspections are geared toward identifying critical violations. Training inspections provide customized food safety training depending on the needs of the establishment.

We are confident that shifting our inspection focus will better serve Alexandria's food establishments and the public who dine at them.

Holiday Letter from Food Safety Advisory Council

To our Restaurant Operator Community:

The holidays are a time where we welcome many families to our food service operations. This year with all the added stresses that our customers are facing they will be looking for great food that is safe.

It is a great time to reflect on some food safety principles that we should be doing every day, but that are ever essential this time of year. With many holiday meals we generally wind up making larger batches of food like large turkeys and hams, lots of mashed potatoes and delicious stuffing.

Take the time to refresh all your staff and managers about the critical control points for handling larger quantities of food items.

Receiving: Make sure any of your protein items i.e. turkeys, are fresh and received at 41˚F or less.

Cold holding: Any potentially hazardous foods that you are going to be working with should be held cold at 41˚F or less.

Preparation: Handle only as much as you can prep within 20 minutes. This could be prepping turkeys for stuffing for example. Keep raw animal foods separate from ready-to-eat foods. Use separate utensils for raw animal foods and ready-to-eat foods. Avoid bare-hand contact with ready-to-eat foods.

Cooking: Use a calibrated thermometer to check the temperature of your turkeys. They should reach an internal temperature of 165F or higher for 15 seconds.

Cooling: THIS IS REALLY CRITICAL: Because we probably don't make as much product as we do for the holidays we may not be used to having excess gravy and stuffing around. Use shallow pans. Check temperatures during the cooling process. The goal is to go from 135˚F to 70˚F in 2 hours and from 135˚F to 41˚F in 6 hours. If you do not achieve these parameters, you MUST discard the food.

Reheating for hot holding: If you prepared any foods in advance, cooled them and are getting them ready for service, remember to reheat products rapidly to 165˚F and then hot hold at 135˚F.

Here is a sanitation reminder about cross-contamination of raw turkey juices. Always store turkeys on the bottom shelf in your walk-in. Ensure that juice from the raw turkeys does not drip on anything. Clean all areas of the kitchen where the raw turkeys may have been prepped.

And lastly, wash hands often and well. Whether you are preventing cross-contamination or limiting the possibility of any viruses, handwashing is always your best defense in keeping food safe.

Have a great and safe holiday season. Your customers are counting on you for a wonderful meal and dining experience.

The Alexandria Food Safety Advisory Council

Changes in Environmental Health Staff

This year saw the departure of three long-time employees. Frank Dickman, Environmental Health Supervisor retired after many years of service. Richard Michelback, who was our Environmental Health Technical Specialist, took a position with the Fairfax County Public Schools. Patrick Jones, formerly an Environmental Health Specialist Senior, became a supervisor in the Prince William County Health Department. As we bid farewell to them, we began the difficult task of filling their positions.

After a summer of searching, we are pleased to welcome three new employees to the Alexandria Health Department, Division of Environmental Health.

Kristin Garcia

Kristin Garcia became Environmental Health Supervisor in June of this year. She is a Registered Environmental Health Specialist (R.E.H.S), holds a Masters in Public Health (M.P.H.) and comes to us from the Fairfax County Health Department where she was an Environmental Health Specialist Senior.

Seyra Hammond

Seyra Hammond became our new Environmental Health Technical Specialist in August 2008. Seyra Hammond worked at the Rappahannock Area Health District and Fairfax County Health Department as an Environmental Health Specialist before joining us.

Stephen Hughes

Our latest addition was Stephen Hughes who joined us as an Environmental Health Specialist Senior in October 2008. Stephen Hughes leaves the Prince William County Health Department where he also worked as an Environmental Health Specialist. Join us in welcoming our three new Environmental Health Professionals. You may see them walking into your establishment soon!

Alexandria Food Safety Advisory Council Members

Restaurant Association

Jennifer Lehman

Restaurant Assoc. of Metro Washington

Local Fast Food Restaurant

Anne Hyde, Manager

Generous George's Restaurant

Local Restaurant / Sports Bar

Susan Grandgeorge, Owner

Joe Theisman's Restaurant

Local Bakery / Coffee Pub

Nora Partlow, Owner

St. Elmo's Coffee Pub

National / Regional Fast Food Chain

Regina Poteet, Regional QA Manager

Starbucks

National / Regional Full Service Chain

Victoria Griffith, Director of QA

Clyde's Restaurant Group

School Food Service

Becky Bays, Director

Food & Nutrition Services

Alexandria City Public Schools

Food Manufacturer

Sylvie Porphire, Director of QA

Cuisine Solutions

Hotel

Taurus Phillips, Director, Food & Beverage

Hilton Hotel (1767 King St.)

Caterer

Serdar Basegmez
Red Poppy Catering

Hospital Food Service

Randell Lee Whetzel

Director of Production & Catering

Sodexho (Inova Hospital)

Nursing Home Food Service

Lynn Bennett, Asst. Dir. of Nursing

The Fountains

Consumers

Sarah Klein, Staff Attorney

Center for Science in the Public Interest

Consumers

Cynthia Staats

Safe Tables Our Priority (STOP)

Academia

Charlene Douglas – George Mason Univ.

School of Nursing

Academia

Heather Jones, Home Economist

Cooperative Extension Service

Food Safety Publisher

Declan Conroy, Publisher

Setanta Publishing

Alexandria Health Department

Bob Custard, Environmental Health Manager

Alexandria Health Department

Cecille Escobar, Environmental Health Spec. Sr.

Alexandria Health Department

Lisa Guli, Epidemiologist

Public Health

Dawn Collins

Va. Dept. Agriculture & Consumer Services

Public Health

Subha Chandar, Program Manager for EH

Nat. Assoc. of County & City Health Officials

These individuals have volunteered their time for the last year to serve on the Alexandria Food Safety Advisory Council. Their fine efforts have advanced food safety in Alexandria and have improved communications between the Health Department, the restaurant industry, and consumers.

If you would like to volunteer to serve on Alexandria's Food Safety Advisory Council in 2009, please contact Bob Custard at:
Bob.Custard@vdh.virginia.gov

What is Melamine?

Many of us are aware of the the recent string of FDA advisories and recalls concerning melamine. We know that it is causing many infants in China to suffer from urinary tract conditions. Reports indicate that over 52,000 infants in China have become ill, more than 12,000 have been hospitalized, and several have died as a result of consuming contaminated Chinese infant formula. What many of us are left wondering is what exactly is it, and what was it doing in food in the first place?

Melamine is a nitrogen containing molecule that has many industrial applications such being used in the manufacture of cooking utensils, plates, papers and industrial coatings. It is suspected that the chemical was added to infant formula in China in order to make the product seem as though it contained more protein. It is not approved for direct addition to human or animal foods marketed in the U.S.

The FDA has taken many measures to protect the U.S. consumer from ingesting melamine in food. It has assured us that none of infant formula produced in the U.S. is contaminated with melamine. The FDA has begun a nation-wide effort to check Asian markets for Chinese-manufactured infant formula. To date, none has been found. A import-alert has been issued to help ensure that Chinese dairy products and food and feed products that are contaminated will not reach U.S. consumers. At this point, it seems that only milk or milk-derived ingredients from China are contaminated, but the FDA will continue to examine a range of protein-containing products for possible contamination. It will continue to alert the public to products suspected to contain melamine. So far, the FDA has issued warnings/advisories for the following foods: White Rabbit Creamery Candies, Blue Cat Flavor Drinks, Mr. Brown coffee and tea products, YILI Brand milk drinks, Koala's March creme–filled cookies, and Fresh and Crispy Jacobina Biscuits.

Also important to note, is that melamine does not affect adults and children in the same way. Very small amounts, up to 2.5 parts-per-million, have been deemed permissible for consumption by adults without adverse health risk. However, infants, who consume contaminated formula as their primary food source and having such smaller body weight, run the risk of developing serious health effects. The FDA has not set a permissible level of melamine for consumption by infants.

More information can be found at *www.fda.gov/oc/opacom/hottopics/melamine.html.*

"Reports indicate that over 52,000 infants in China have become ill .... as a result of consuming contaminated Chinese infant formula."