

Patco Food Safety Consultants

January 2007 Edition



A Newsletter Focusing on Food Safety Issues
Volume 4

To Our Valued Customers

Patco Food Safety Consultants is proud to offer our valued clients a quarterly update relating to food safety issues and concerns.

Patco hopes you enjoy these newsletters and encourages any comments, questions or thoughts to be addressed to Patco at the following Fax # 1-315-652-5671.

The **LATEST DIRT** will focus on sanitation topics, regulatory issues, general housekeeping hints for clean establishments, updates on new laws relating to food safety issues and general discussions regarding the benefits of good sanitation and the impact it has on profits and safety in your establishments.

This issue will focus on:
Fighting E.coli
A Few More Safe Food Tips
If we say it – Does it really happen?



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TOP TEN ESSENTIAL HOME KITCHEN TOOLS THAT FIGHT E.COLI BACTERIA

“Everyone is at risk for food-borne illness”, warns Debra Holtzman, an internationally recognized safety and health expert. She recommends using these top 10 essential kitchen tools, which are effective ways to prevent food-borne illness from bacteria, such as E. coli:

1. **Produce scrub brush.** Before eating any raw produce, it should be washed thoroughly under clean, running water. Use a scrub brush, if appropriate. Wash and scrub produce that has a rind, too, such as cantaloupe and pineapple. Why? Pathogens on the outside of the rind can contaminate the inside when you cut it and it won't necessarily be cooked to destroy the bacteria.
2. **Large-dial oven safe or oven-probe food thermometers.** It is used for testing whole poultry and roasts during cooking, and may be used for the duration of cooking. The thermometer should be inserted in the thickest part of the food and should not be touching bone, fat, or gristle. Whole chicken or turkey should reach a minimum temperature of 180° F. (measure in the thigh). Breast and roasts should reach a minimum temperature of 170°F.
3. **Digital instant-read food thermometer for testing meat patties.** This is for use toward the end of cooking time but before the food is expected to be “done.” It should be inserted at least one-half inch into patties. If patties are thick, insert into side. Make sure it reads at least 160°F. Color does not reliably indicate whether ground beef patties have been cooked to a temperature high enough to kill E coli 0157:H7, a potentially deadly bacteria. Thermometers are inexpensive and easy to use; but make sure you follow the instructions and have the right kind for the job you're doing. Remember to wash, rinse and sanitize the food thermometer between temperature measurements.
- 4 & 5. **Appliance thermometers for refrigerator and freezer.** Use an appliance thermometer to be sure the refrigerator is 40° F or lower and the freezer is at 0°F. Make sure to check thermometers periodically.
- 6 & 7. **Two cutting boards.** One for cutting produce and other ready-to-eat foods and one for raw meat, poultry and fish. If the boards can be cleaned in the dishwasher, so much the better.
8. **Paper Towels.** Even if you're trying to limit the use of throwaway products, Debra Holtzman recommends that you consider using paper towels to clean up all kitchen surfaces, especially those touched by raw meat, poultry, or seafood juices. Harmful bacterial multiply quickly on kitchen towels, sponges, and cloths. If you choose to use cloth items, wash them often in the hot water cycle of your washing machine. If you choose to use sponges, discard them often.
9. **Chlorine Bleach.** When sanitizing your kitchen surfaces, (which should be done often) use a solution of 1 teaspoon of chlorine bleach per quart of water, or an approved ready-to-use surface sanitizer available at your local store. Carefully follow manufacturer's instructions.
10. **Soap Dispenser.** Wash your hands, with soap and warm water, (and use a nail brush) for at least 20 seconds before and after handling food, beverages and utensils. Make sure to clean the counters, cutting boards and utensils thoroughly with hot, soapy water after use and before using them on another food. Debra Holtzman is an award-winning parenting author. She has been featured on NBC's Today Show, CNBC, MSNBC, and Discovery Health Channel. Her latest book, *The Safe Baby: A Do-it-yourself guide to Home Safety* (Sentient Publications) is in bookstores everywhere.

<http://thesafetyexpert.com>

A FEW MORE SAFE FOOD TIPS

We can take steps too, to assure safer food. The following tips are from the CDC (Centers for Disease Control):

1. If you are served undercooked meat at a restaurant, send it back for further cooking. You should ask for a new bun and a clean plate, too.
2. Keep raw meat separate from ready-to-eat meat. Wash hands, counters, and utensils with hot soapy water after they touch raw meat. Never place cooked hamburgers or ground beef on the unwashed plate that held raw patties. Wash meat thermometers between tests of patties that require further cooking.
3. Drink only pasteurized milk, juice or cider.
4. Wash fruits and vegetables under running water, especially those that will not be cooked. Be aware that bacteria are sticky, so even thorough washing may not remove all contamination. Remove the outer leaves of leafy vegetables.
5. Everyone, especially children, should wash their hands carefully with soapy water after using the bathroom. The same is true for everyone changing diapers.



IF WE SAY IT – DOES IT REALLY HAPPEN?

How many times have you said something to a family member or Employee and walked away assuming it would be done? How many times does it really happen? My friends with children regularly tell me that just saying it does not mean it will happen. If you have teenagers, you really know what I mean.

Are your Managers and Employees really following good Food Safety practices? Are your Executives? Are your Executives, Managers, and Employees actually practicing good Food Safety or is it just talk? Lead by example may have a different meaning than we hope it does.

The food industry frequently pairs a new Employee with an experienced one (sometimes called apron string training). How do we know that the practices being shared are good ones? I will never forget a television expose' statement: 'That was the right way to do it, now I will show you how we really do it'. I promise that the way they really do it was not acceptable – and it was not the company policy.

Ok – Let's get real. We have a Manager who fails a Food Safety exam. Does it mean that he or she does not or will not use good Food Safety? NO. Does it mean that he or she did not pass a written exam? Yes. There are a lot of reasons they did not pass including:

- Fear of tests
- Poor training
- Bad test
- Inadequate reading or language skills
- Lack of Food Safety knowledge, etc.

What about the Manager who passes the test – maybe with a high score? Does it mean they will use Food Safety? No – it just means they answered the passing percentage of questions on a written exam. Does this translate into actual practices in the field? Good question.

Let's create a Positive Food Safety Culture. What results are we looking for? We want Managers (persons in charge) and Employees who **UNDERSTAND AND USE** Food Safety. A pretty certificate on the wall is nice, but it does not mean much if we don't actually use and share Food Safety.

I attended a meeting last November. All the attendees were Food Safety experts. One of our goals was to describe future research topics to improve Food Safety practices at retail. I suggested research on what actually increases good Food Safety practices. I then asked how many people in the room had actually washed their hands before lunch. It certainly was not 100%. I admit it, although I had washed my hands that time I can't promise that I wash my hands every time I should.

I have always believed in marketing Food Safety: make it positive and profitable. If we make something important, then it is more likely to happen. If we provide the materials, time, and support – then it is more likely to happen. If we reward instead of punish – then it is more likely to happen.

I have always believed that Food Safety is as much an art of communication as a science. I have had the privilege of training in a wide variety of countries and cultures. What a learning experience for me. To simplify the attitude I used the following:

Learn Food Safety
Believe Food Safety
Live Food Safety
Share Food Safety

How do we make this happen? We need Food Safety to be important to everyone. People will find a way to make it happen – if it is important to them. Busy people always find time to go to their children's soccer games if it is important. People wash their hands – if it is important to them and if they are supported.

Why don't all Employees wash their hands as needed? Are supplies and equipment available? Is the sink easily accessible, clean and unobstructed? Do Managers and Executives wash their hands frequently and lead by example? A friend asked me why there were no hand sinks in school cafeterias. I remember one in my grade school – you could not enter without washing your hands.

If hand washing is so important, then why don't **100%** of Food Safety experts wash their hands before eating?

FDA is working to help improve Food Safety behavior. On Nov 30, 2006 FDA presented a satellite presentation "Reducing Risk Factors at Retail and Food Service" Frank Yiannas, Director of Safety and health for Walt Disney world was a key presenter. His topic shared a variety of ideas that they use to combine behavioral and food science. Positive reinforcement (not punishment like reprimands or complaints) is used to increase the probability of good Food Safety practices. Certificates, awards, and a concentrated effort to make sure that Employees doing the right things are rewarded are key elements.

FDA says that the presentation will be available on DVD – hopefully in the near future. <http://www.cfsan.fda.gov/~comm/vltret.html>).

Did you notice that Employee, Manager, Executive and even Food Safety are capitalized in this presentation – which looks more important to you: Manager or manager, Employee or employee? Do you remember the gold stars you received in school? Didn't you appreciate the positive feeling you had that day?

To succeed we need a positive Food Safety culture. Several other presenters explained how their companies are turning away from punishment toward rewards. For example many critical Food Safety steps are really viewed as punishment not rewards. For example, end of the day cleaning is frequently assigned to the new hire. The reward for them is a promotion and no longer having to do the dirty work. How important does cleaning become when the least knowledgeable person is assigned to clean up? The dirty work is then viewed as punishment rather than a critical Food Safety process with positive results. The Employee's goal is to get a promotion and get away from the negative task.

Dr. Donna Beegle was also a participant in the program. She was hired to assess the role of communication in food-borne outbreaks (Oregon Environmental Health Specialists). The results are being reviewed at this time. Hopefully her insightful research will be available to the public in the near future.

How can we begin? The first step is to realize that talk is not a dirty 4 letter word. Communication and actually hearing and believing Food Safety is critical for success. Learning and Using Food Safety are critical goals. Are you creating a positive Food Safety culture at your company? To quote a famous TV space travel show whose captain always said it so positively and with such authority "Make it so!

Good luck and good job!

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