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Food Safety News

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Food Defense Prevents Food Terrorism

Everyone appreciates that grocery stores, restaurants and other food businesses are pillars of our society. Providing wholesome food in welcoming environments to thousands of customers every day creates neighborhood connections and strengthens our economy.

However, for these very reasons, they are also attractive to would-be food terrorists, who would want to contaminate food to harm customers and cause financial damage.

Here are some effective food defense strategies you can implement right now to prevent food terrorism:

- It literally only takes seconds to contaminate our food, so we have to be vigilant!
- Criminals are less likely to act if they think they're being watched. If someone seems to be loitering, ask them if they need help.
- Ensure that non-public doors are locked when not in use.
- Keep in mind that imposter health inspectors have been a concern in our area in the recent past.
- Be sure that visitors are identified and badged. If you doubt their identification contact their home office for verification.
- Monitor buffets and open food displays - Is someone lingering around them without buying food? Ask them if they need help to let them know you're watching.
- Separate returns and foods in abandoned shopping carts, and check for tampered or compromised packaging.
- Employees should report any suspicious behavior to their management team immediately.

Please call (216) 201-2000 or visit [CCBH.NET/food defense](http://CCBH.NET/food%20defense) to learn more.

If you are interested in receiving materials to support food defense in your facility, please contact CCBH Food Defense Coordinator, Jim Armstrong, at: jarmstrong@ccbh.net, or call 216-201-2001 x1251.

If you believe food has been contaminated, remove it from sale. Call your local law enforcement agency and the Cuyahoga County Board of Health at 216.201.2000 Visit our [food defense page](#) to learn more. Remember, if you see something, say something.

Norovirus: It's Not the Flu

When employees call in sick with upper or lower gastrointestinal distress (vomiting or diarrhea), you may think that the problem is the “stomach flu.” It is more likely they have Norovirus.

If you have been watching the news lately, you have probably seen a famous chain restaurant that has been implicated in a Norovirus outbreak. Outbreaks like these can easily put a smaller food operation out of business. The good news is that these steps can help you prevent a Norovirus outbreak from happening at your facility.

- 1 Encourage your employees to wash hands thoroughly with warm soapy water for a minimum of 20 seconds, to rinse and then dry hands with a clean paper towel before touching food, utensils or food contact surfaces like tables and menus.
- 2 Have an employee illness policy that encourages ill employees to report communicable symptoms such as diarrhea, jaundice (yellow eyes or skin), open lesions or sores on their skin, sore throat with fever, or vomiting to their manager. These symptoms could be signs of an illness that could be transmitted through food. Please call the Board of Health at 216-201-2000 to discuss employees who may have communicable symptoms.

3 Get a doctor’s opinion if the symptoms are severe enough for the employee to miss work. We recommend the employee sees a doctor prior to returning so that they can be cleared to touch food or dishes. It is best to allow a medical professional to decide if it is safe for the employee to return to work. Sometimes these symptoms are not part of a foodborne illness (for example, a pregnant worker might vomit), so each ill employee should be interviewed by the manager.

4 Some food operations have a rule that says that until an employee has missed three days of work, a doctor’s note is not required. Even though Norovirus symptoms might only be severe enough to keep an employee out for 1-2 days, that same employee can shed Norovirus in their stool for many days after their last symptom. This may be true even if the employee doesn’t feel sick.

5 Many food workers do not have health insurance. However, they may be eligible for free or low cost health insurance, prescription coverage, dental coverage and other benefits. Have employees use a land line to call 2-1-1 or go online at [2-1-1 United Way](#) to contact First Call for Help to check eligibility. Don’t wait until they are sick—register today!

6 Surfaces can become contaminated with Norovirus. Once fomite surfaces like a door handle, table, or telephone are contaminated, Norovirus can “live” there for up to seven weeks. The best way to kill Norovirus is to sanitize surfaces with an EPA-approved disinfectant. Unfortunately, most quaternary ammonia products cannot kill Norovirus.



Quality Assurance (QA)

Monitor the food you prepare from receiving through service with a [food temperature log](#).

Keep ill employees out of your operation to keep your employees and customers safe. Monitor their health with an [employee illness log](#).

Clean and sanitary facilities make customers feel welcome. Monitor cleaning in your facility with a [cleaning schedule](#).

Don't hesitate to contact us if you have specific QA questions.



Serving Salads Safely

You may have noticed a number of foodborne illnesses associated with salads and raw produce in recent years. Here are some important tips to keep in mind to ensure food safety when handling salads and other produce:

- Before handling any food items, always thoroughly wash hands with warm soapy water to prevent contamination of food and surfaces.
- Be sure to thoroughly wash, rinse and sanitize cutting boards and counter tops where clean produce will be processed.
- Wash produce thoroughly with warm running water to remove dirt and visible contaminants.
- If soiled, a small soft bristled vegetable brush helps to removed caked on dirt.
- **NEVER** cut or slice dirty produce as soil can contaminate the meat of the produce and cause a foodborne illness.
- Bruised or damaged parts of the produce should be cut away and discarded as these could be signs of spoilage which can cause illness.
- If your facility is lacking a food preparation sink, you should purchase pre-cleaned produce.
- Remember that cut leafy greens, cut tomatoes, cut melons and raw seed sprouts (bean and alfalfa) are time and temperature controlled for safety (TCS) foods that can quickly support bacterial growth when stored in the temperature danger zone (41-135°F).
- Prepare large amounts of produce in small batches and move prepped items back into the cooler to ensure food safety.
- When cooking, use a calibrated instant read thermometer to ensure the produce reaches 135°F or above to kill pathogens.
- Cooked produce is a TCS food that requires date marking and a 7 day rotation to limit the growth of pathogens that cause foodborne illness.



Important Alerts: New Food Code Updates

Effective March 1, 2019, there are several new Uniform Food Safety Code updates that affect every facility:

- All food prep employees must have all of their hair (including short hair and facial hair) covered while prepping food
- Latex gloves are no longer permitted anywhere in the facility

For a more comprehensive list of food code updates, click here:

[2019 Uniform Food Safety Code Amendments](#)



Coming Clean to Prevent Outbreaks

Every facility should have written procedures for cleaning up vomit and/or diarrhea:

- Cover outer clothing, shoes and hands to prevent their contamination during clean-up.
- Use disposable towels to remove any solid waste (vomit or diarrhea) and then thoroughly wash the surfaces.
- After cleaning, use clear water to rinse away any excess soap.
- Use an approved chemical disinfectant in proper concentrations (use a test kit to determine those concentrations) to kill pathogens (organisms that cause disease). Be sure that the disinfectant touches the surface for the appropriate dwell time.