



Northern Health Food Digest

April 2011 Edition, Issue 2

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From the Editor

Thanks for picking up the second edition of Northern Health's quarterly food newsletter. This newsletter is made for you - restaurant operators, food handlers and culinary experts - to ensure that the services that you are providing are up to date with current health standards. We hope that you find the information in here useful and that it helps bridge the gap between food handlers and health inspectors. You can expect to find information on current hot topics in food safety, updates on outbreaks, and tips

and tricks of the trade to make safe food handling as easy as breathing (like the handy "how to pass your food inspection" checklist included in this issue). We are looking for feedback! What would you like to read about? What kinds of tips or resources would you like to see and was this issue useful to you? Would you rather save a tree and receive an electronic copy? Please fill out our reader satisfaction cards and mail them back to us, or contact your local Environmental Health Officer.



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FoodSafe Corner

If you own a restaurant, you know that at least one person on shift at all times must have food safety certification. FoodSafe is now available online in an online 'virtual' class through Open School BC, or by correspondence (Level 1 only) through Go2. See www.FoodSafe.ca for available courses in your area or links to online courses. You can also contact your local continuing education department, community college or see the yellow pages for private instructors.

MarketSafe is now available.

MarketSafe is a food safety training program for farmers and producers who make, bake or grow products to sell at local farmers' markets, farm gates or other types of temporary food markets. It was designed to increase awareness and knowledge of food safety and safe food handling procedures for farmers' market vendors, market managers, farm gate vendors, home kitchen small scale food processors, and others who may make, bake or produce food products for public consumption outside of regulated food service establishments.

Contact your local Environmental Health Officer to find an instructor/class near you!

NOTICE:

Another potential Scam, people misrepresenting themselves . .

There have been reports of unknown person or persons contacting restaurant operators and claiming to be from the local health department. The exact reason for the calls vary, but it is presumed to be something underhanded. If you are contacted by unknown person or persons be certain they are affiliated with Northern Health, have them produce identification. If you receive a phone call and it is not your health inspector, you can take their Phone number and offer to call them back and give their name and the phone # to your health inspector. He or she can pass the information to appropriate authorities.



Melons

Many fruits are popular in the summer heat; and juicy melons top the list. But while most fruits are somewhat acidic, melons are not. This distinction means melons are a higher food safety risk.

Why?

Generally speaking, the more acidic a food is, the less easily bacteria are able to grow in it. Since melons tend to be relatively neutral in pH, (like most meats!) any bacteria which come into contact with the flesh may be able to grow. If these bacteria are pathogens, they can lead to illness.

How?

Bacteria can come into contact with the flesh of the melon through bruises or as the melon is handled, peeled or cut. Care must be taken when preparing melons (especially the thin-skinned cantaloupe), and any equipment used must be sanitized first. After preparing, cut melons must not be left out for longer than 2 hours.

Remember: Treat melons as carefully as meats!

Use sanitary surfaces, sanitary knives, refrigerate and keep melons away from other foods! These ready-to-eat foods have a high risk

Hepatitis A:

Reminder

Of all the types of foodborne illness, the one that puts fear into the hearts of many restaurant operators is **Hepatitis A**.

Why?

An outbreak of Hepatitis A is more likely to result in a restaurant going out of business than any other type of outbreak. And the sad part is that is Hepatitis A is one of the easier organisms to control.

All you have to do is wash your hands; well and often.

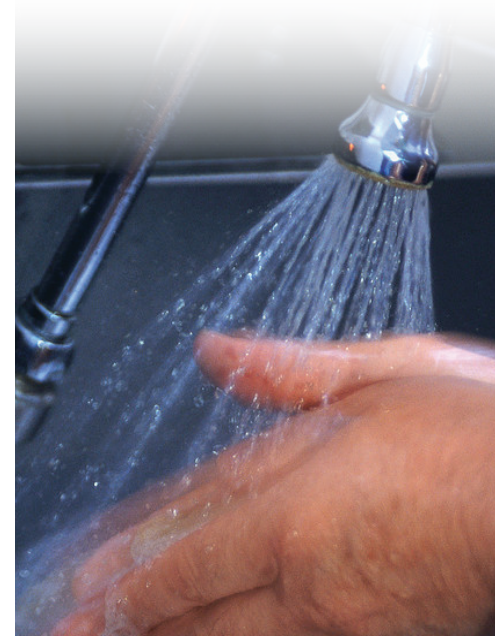
Hepatitis A is spread through faecal-oral transmission. This means that faecal material from an infected person must be consumed by another person for the disease to spread.

Sounds appetizing, doesn't it?

Your customers won't think so.

Not that long ago, Hepatitis A was considered a childhood illness along with measles, mumps and chicken pox. And in those parts of the world without running water and proper sewage disposal, it is still primarily a childhood illness.

These days most outbreaks in North America involve an infected food handler, poor personal hygiene, and lots of news coverage.



So what can you do?

As the operator of a food service facility, you can't control what your staff members do outside of the workplace.

But you can control what they do during their work shifts. Make sure all food handlers wash their hands before coming on shift, after breaks, after smoking, and after handling raw foods. And make sure they visit a doctor if they feel ill.

The importance of hand washing cannot be overemphasized. Do it early and do it often.

Use warm water, liquid hand soap, and a good scrub brush for under fingernails.

Make hand washing a priority in your food premises, and keep Hepatitis A from affecting your livelihood and the health of your customers.

Note: BCCDC recommends Hepatitis A vaccination for food handlers. It also recommends this immunization to travellers to areas where Hep A is intermediate or highly endemic. Check with your public Health Nurse to determine the avenue you need to take to receive Hep A immunization.

Food Safety with... EGGS

Eggs are a popular ingredient in many recipes, and are found in most food establishments. Their use can vary from simple breakfast dishes to creamy dressings and sauces, and even rich desserts. But is safety with eggs an automatic thing? In a word, no.

When you consider that eggs come from poultry, it stands to reason that there is a risk of contamination with microorganisms found in poultry. Among these is the well-known pathogen *Salmonella* overcoming the risks of illness with eggs involves some organization and planning.

To begin with, eggs are nutritious and appealing to bacteria, as well as people. Bacteria grow best when in a warm environment (between 4°C/40°F and 60°C/140°F). Keeping eggs out of this temperature range will limit bacterial growth.

This means **constant refrigeration** from the time they enter your premises until they are used.

Some recipes present a higher risk than others, particularly if they include raw eggs. If you intend on serving dishes containing raw eggs, look very closely at the way these dishes are prepared. Be especially careful not to allow any outside contamination to enter these foods. Also, don't allow them to be

served after 2 hours. It is much safer to make small quantities of these foods as close to serving time as possible. If possible use Pasteurized eggs.

Remembering the risks presented by any eggs, using cracked eggs is a very dangerous practice since microorganisms that are given an opportunity to enter an egg will find the contents very attractive.

Commercially packaged eggs [*including some free-range eggs*] must meet minimum standards before they are considered approved.

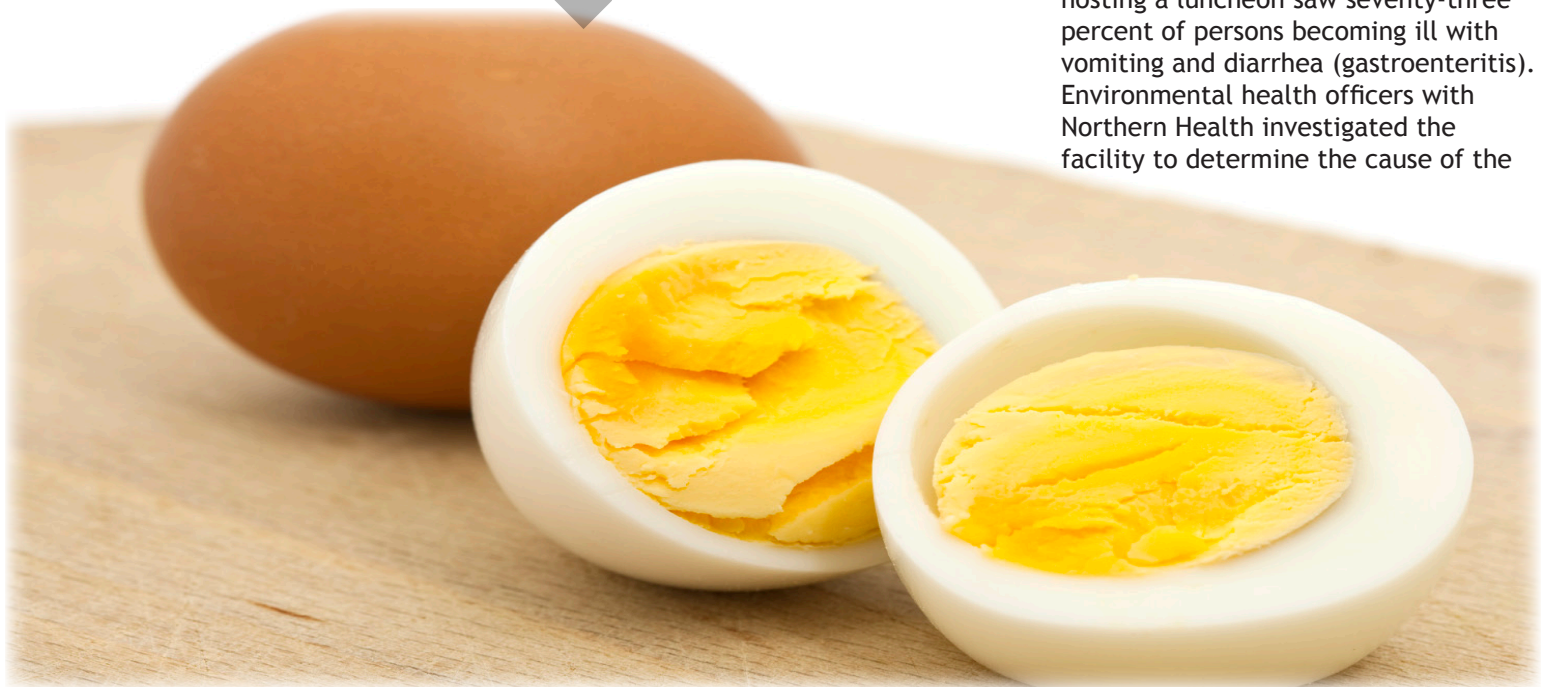
"Farm Fresh eggs" are not graded or inspected and may not have been adequately washed, or stored at correct temperatures. It is for this reason that EGGs used in a food premises must be from approved sources. This is your only assurance that they have been safely handled, and inspected for quality.

If handled correctly, and treated carefully from the time they arrive in your premises, EGGs can be a safe and delicious part of your menu.

If not, the results can be disastrous.

They're out there, they're nearly perfect at what they do, and they've got the numbers to prove it: What your food business can do to avoid becoming another statistic

Recently a northern BC restaurant hosting a luncheon saw seventy-three percent of persons becoming ill with vomiting and diarrhea (gastroenteritis). Environmental health officers with Northern Health investigated the facility to determine the cause of the



outbreak and collected stool samples from the ill. It was determined that the food had been contaminated with a virus that is known all too well to the restaurant and tourism industry: norovirus.

Norovirus (previously called Norwalk or Norwalk-like virus) is responsible for causing over fifty percent of foodborne illnesses in the US, and similarly high percentages are seen in Canada and the rest of the developed world. The virus is transmitted through the fecal-oral route- the virus contaminates the hands after using the washroom, and if proper hand washing is not followed, any virus remaining on the hands can be spread to anything in the environment the person may touch, including food.

Why is the virus responsible for such a high burden of illness, or in other words, why is it so good at what it does? Unlike some infamous bacteria like salmonella, campylobacter, and e.coli which may require hundreds of thousands of the bacteria to be present in the food to cause illness, norovirus requires only as few as ten particles to make you ill, and yet when ill you can shed billions of the viruses in the stool. Add to this extremely low infectious dose that there is no long-term immunity to the virus- a person can become ill again and again if exposed to the virus, that it can survive on indoor surfaces like door handles for many hours, that in winter months especially the virus is very common in the community at large, norovirus will present a significant challenge to the food service industry into the future.

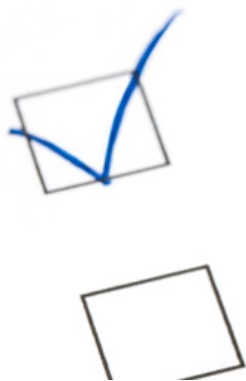
How can you prevent norovirus from impacting your business? Like with other disease-causing organisms which may enter your establishment via people, food, and objects, applying basic fundamentals of food safety can reduce your risk of an outbreak. Here are some important key defences:

1. Exclude ill food handlers- encourage staff to inform management should they ever become ill with gastroenteritis, or importantly, have just recovered while on days off. Persons infected with norovirus can recover very quickly, often within 24 hours, and feel able to return to work. However the person will still be

shedding the virus for days after recovery. Ill food handlers cannot return to any functions where they will come into contact with food, food contact surfaces, or equipment until at least 48 hours after the last symptom.

2. Hand washing- Provide adequate hand washing stations where workers can see them, post hand washing signage, and make hand washing an integral part of the food handler's duties. If single-use gloves are used, remember they are not a substitute for proper hand washing and hands must be washed as when doing similar activities without gloves.
3. Protecting foods from contamination- Limit direct contact with foods through using sanitary utensils where possible, keep foods in covered sanitary containers, wash well any fruits and vegetables that will be served raw. Discard any foods handled by an employee whom you believe was suffering from gastroenteritis just prior, during, or after their shift.

Speak to your environmental health officer (EHO) if you would like further information on norovirus, or would like assistance with your food safety plan to protect against this and other illnesses transmitted through food. If you are ever contacted by a customer who believes they have become ill from your establishment to collect their contact information and to immediately you're your EHO for follow up.



EHO Visit? Don't Panic! Revisited with a few improvements?

EHO Visit? Don't Panic! Revisited with a few improvements?

If you run a food establishment you may have received a letter, a telephone call or a visit from an Environmental Health Officer. They are also known as Health Protection Officers or Public Health Inspectors.

The visit may be for one of several reasons:

1. Routine inspection: EHO's inspect public facilities like restaurants regularly to ensure that the health and safety of the public is not at risk.
2. Follow up inspection: as a way of checking that problems found in a previous inspection or as a result of a complaint from a member of the public or staff have been corrected or are in the process of being corrected.
3. EHO's will sometimes visit a food establishment for other reasons such as carrying out surveys or providing advice as part of a wider project.
4. The EHO could also be following up on a complaint or investigating a foodborne illness.

The following is a checklist of items that your local EHO will be looking for on their next inspection. Remember to go through this checklist regularly, apply it to your facility, and you should have a favourable result on your next inspection.



Food Premises Check List

To use this tool, simply put a check mark in the box to the left of the phrase as you check them.

Put an X if corrective action is required

- Pasteurized milk or milk products only
- Water and ice from approved sources and protected from contamination
- Shellfish, fish, meat and meat products from approved sources
 - Canned goods obtained from approved commercial processor (no home canning) and in satisfactory condition: no leaking, dented, rusted or swollen cans
 - Eggs un-cracked, clean and from approved sources
 - Food protected from chemicals, spoilage or other extraneous matter
- Ready-to-eat food separated from un-sanitized surfaces or utensils
- Ready-to-eat food not subjected to cross-contamination with raw food
- Food stored or refrigerated in a manner so that cross-contamination cannot occur
- Food protected from contamination by sewage or condensation from waste pipes
- Food protected from customer contamination; customer-served foods displayed with sneeze guards
- Toxic or poisonous chemicals are properly labelled, stored, used so that contamination of food will not occur
- Acid foods are not stored in containers or pipes that consist of toxic metals (antimony, cadmium, copper, zinc, lead).
- Food stored in approved containers or bins and properly covered
- Foods properly labelled / repackaged
- Foods stored off the floor
- Food protected from contamination during transportation or display / storage / preparation
- Adequate personal cleanliness / clean attire / controlled hair
- No tobacco use, eating / drinking in food prep., dishwashing and/or food storage areas
 - Food workers are not ill with a disease transmissible by foods such as diarrhea ("stomach flu"), hepatitis, or have infected cuts or burns on their hands.
- Food workers use proper utensils (tongs, spoons, plastic gloves) to eliminate unnecessary hand contact with cooked and prepared foods.
- Adequate hand washing by food handlers
 - Soap, paper towels, and/or hand wash basin with hot and cold running water in preparation area
 - Hand wash basin easily accessible and not being used for other purposes
- All potentially hazardous foods (PHF's) are stored under refrigeration (4°C or less) except during necessary preparation procedures (no room temperature storage unless covered in the food safety plan)
 - {If room temperature is used for serving PHF's then the food must be discarded after 4 hours}. [If an EHO suspects that the food has been out too long he or she may recommend immediate disposal. See food safety Plan
- Potentially hazardous foods cooled to 4°C or less within 2 hours, in an approved manner
- Adequate equipment / space available for keeping all potentially hazardous food at 4 °C or less
- Potentially hazardous foods thawed in a safe manner
- Potentially hazardous foods stored hot are kept at 60°C or above during hot holding
- Adequate equipment for proper hot holding of PHF's
- All poultry, poultry stuffing, pork, stuffed meats and stuffing containing meat are heated to 74°C or more.
 - All other potentially hazardous foods requiring cooking are heated to 74°C or above before they are placed in hot holding equipment.
- Wash and rinse water clean and at proper temperatures
- Hand dishwashing technique correct
- Sanitizing rinse solutions at proper temperature, or concentration for proper time
- Adequate dishwashing thermometer, gauges and/or chemical test kit
- Wiping cloths are clean, restricted in use and stored in approved sanitizing solution
- Non-food contact surfaces of equipment and utensils are maintained and clean
- Food contact surfaces adequately washed, rinsed and sanitized
- Dishes and utensils visibly clean after washing
- Glasses handled / stored properly
- In use food including (ice) dispensing utensils properly stored.
- Floors, wall, ceilings properly constructed and installed, in good repair with clean surfaces
- Adequate lighting / ventilation / exhaust fan
- Food preparation areas separated from living quarters
- Premises maintained free of litter, unnecessary equipment or articles
- Adequate garbage disposal containers / removal frequency
- Waste disposal isolated from the food preparation area
- Effective measures used to control entrance (rodent and insect proof construction) and harborage of rodents, flies, cockroaches and other vermin
- Insects and rodents are controlled
- The shift supervisor / operator is Foodsafe certified
- Adequate food handler training
- Written Food Safety Plan is completed, available for review by food handlers, and being followed
- If a Potentially hazardous food is to be served at room temperature it must be covered in the food safety plan and records must be maintained for each potentially hazardous food served in such a manner.
- Written cleaning and sanitizing procedures available, and followed by staff
- Accurate refrigeration / hot holding thermometer is provided
- Temperature records are available for freezers, refrigerators and hot holding equipment