

Food Service Quarterly Newsletter

October – December 2006



As part of LMAS District Health Department's continuing stride to provide news and information to the public that we serve, we are proud to present this quarter's newsletter. Inside you will find information on new and emerging issues in the food service world. We hope that you find the following information beneficial.



Norovirus; A Leading Cause of Foodborne Illness

The CDC has estimated that 23 million cases of acute gastroenteritis are due to Norovirus infection, and it is now thought that 50% of all foodborne outbreaks of gastroenteritis can be attributed to noroviruses. The incubation period for Norovirus is usually between 24 and 48 hours with a median in outbreaks between 33 and 36 hours. A person infected with Norovirus can experience symptoms of vomiting, watery non-bloody diarrhea, cramps, or nausea that usually last between 24 and 60 hours. Noroviruses are highly contagious and as few as 10 viral particles may be sufficient to infect a person. People who are sick with Norovirus can vomit without warning, and the vomit is infectious. Norovirus particles in vomit can travel 40 feet in all directions. Should a person become ill and vomit in your food establishment, all surfaces within the 40-foot range need to be cleaned and disinfected with 200ppm chlorine solution (quaternary ammonium solution will not disinfect noroviruses). Furthermore, any food items that may have become contaminated should be thrown out. Linens should be promptly washed at high temperatures. Noroviruses are relatively resistant to environmental challenges: they are able to survive freezing, temperatures as high as 140F, and in up to 10ppm chlorine solution. Remember to keep sick employees out of food establishments, wash your hands frequently, and sanitize all food-contact surfaces regularly.

Routine Inspections Review

During the last quarter, from July 1st through September 30th, the LMAS District Health Department has kept track of all violations marked during routine inspections. Out of the 112 inspections that were conducted there was a grand total of 122 critical violations observed. This breaks down to an average of 1.1 critical violations per establishment. Improper Date-Marking was the most common violation occurring during 22% of the inspections. In a not so distant second was Separation of Raw and Ready-to-Eat foods (14%), while Demonstration of Knowledge by the Person-in-Charge was in a close third occurring at 12% of the facilities inspected. The following are ways in which these violations can be corrected:

Date-Marking: Potentially Hazardous, Ready-to-Eat foods need to be date-marked with the **discard** date, which is 6 days from the day that the food is prepared or the package is opened (7 days if you include the day of preparation or opening of the package in the count).

Separation of Raw and Ready-to-Eat Foods: Raw animal products need to be kept away from ready-to-eat foods to avoid contamination. Be sure to store your raw animal products in the following order from top to bottom in your coolers:

Ready-to-eat foods, prepared foods

Raw fish, pork, eggs

Raw beef

Raw chicken

Demonstration of Knowledge: One of the ways to meet the demonstration of knowledge requirement is to obtain the ServSafe Certification. Contact your local Health Department to find out about ServSafe Course availability in our area.

Produce Recalls Due to E. Coli Contamination

In the last month the United States has experienced recalls on lettuce and spinach due to the fresh produce being contaminated with E.coli. On October 8, 2006 the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) became aware that The Nunes Company, Inc. of Salinas, California initiated a voluntary recall of green leaf lettuce that was distributed under the Foxy Brand. It was reported that the water used to irrigate the lettuce plants in the field during growing was contaminated with E.coli. There have been no known human illnesses linked to this recall. The FDA views the firm's prompt action as commendable, stating that it is better to be cautious than to potentially put consumers at risk for contracting a serious foodborne illness. The other better-known recall is for fresh spinach produced by Natural Selection Foods that is contaminated with E.coli O157:H7 and has caused a national foodborne illness outbreak affecting 26 states. As of October 6, 2006 there were 199 cases of illness reported to the CDC, including 31 cases of Hemolytic Uremic Syndrome, 102 hospitalizations, and 3 deaths. There have been 4 cases reported in the State of Michigan. The FDA is still reminding the public that Natural Selection Foods has recalled all spinach products under multiple brand names with a date of October 1, 2006 or earlier. There have been five other recalls from different companies because they receive Natural Selection Foods spinach. These companies include Kenter Canyon Farms, Inc., Pacific Coast Fruit Company, S.T. Produce, RLB Food Distributors, and River Ranch. In order to protect consumers, food service operators should not sell raw spinach or blends that may contain raw spinach that was processed by Natural Selection Foods and all other brand subject to the recalls. Processed spinach (e.g., frozen and canned spinach) is not implicated in this outbreak. The FDA continues to work closely with the CDC and state and local agencies to determine the cause and scope of the E.coli O157:H7 outbreak in spinach. Please check www.fda.gov for updates.

National Food Safety Education Month Contest Winner

The LMAS District Health Department is pleased to announce Pickleman's Pantry & Pub of Newberry as the winner of the 2006 National Food Safety Education Month Contest! Pickleman's Pantry & Pub received a sponsored spot in the ServSafe Certification course that will be held this coming spring and recognition in the local papers of Luce, Mackinac, Alger, and Schoolcraft counties. The LMAS District Health Department would like to thank all Food Establishments in our district that participated in this year's National Food Safety Education Month this past September. As you are all aware, Food Safety is an important issue that the Food Service Industry faces on a daily basis. One of the best methods for preserving food safety is through active managerial control. The LMAS District Health Department encourages you to continue to hold employee trainings/meetings to keep your employees up to date and/or refresh their memories on proper food safety techniques. National Food Safety Education Month may be over, but we hope that food safety education will continue in your facilities throughout the year.

