TOP 5 FOOD SAFETY TIPS

Each year in the United States, as many as 76 million people are affected by foodborne illness — 325,000 of them are hospitalized and 5,000 die! Economic loss from foodborne illness is officially estimated at somewhere between 10 and 83 BILLION dollars… *EACH YEAR!* You can help REDUCE these numbers by following the 5 food safety tips described below. For information on other safe food handling practices, contact the County of Santa Clara Department of Environmental Health.

September is National Food Safety Month

Use this opportunity to educate your employees on the importance of food safety with these 5 steps that will help keep the food you serve safe… your action may save a life!

1. **Keep hands clean and avoid hand contact with ready-to-eat foods.**

Always wash hands after using the restroom or doing anything else that contaminates them. Typical activities that contaminate hands include:

- working with raw foods;
- touching body parts such as the hair and face;
- handling dirty utensils or equipment, or clearing a customer's table;
- using hands to cover the mouth when coughing or sneezing;
- smoking.

Food handlers MUST minimize direct hand contact with ready-to-eat foods by using clean utensils—*not bare hands*—whenever possible.

2. **Make sure employees are healthy and always practice good personal hygiene.**

Emphasize the importance of NOT working with food when ill. Set an example by allowing employees to see you frequently wash your own hands.

- Make sure handwash stations are working, and soap and paper towel dispensers are always filled.
- Post signs that emphasize the need for frequent handwashing.
- Set high expectations for personal hygiene, including hair restraints, short and clean fingernails, and clean clothing.
- Inform employees of the symptoms that indicate they may be ill and MUST not work with food.

3. **Keep raw and cooked foods separated to prevent cross-contamination.**

Raw foods—*such as meat, poultry, and fish*—can hide disease-causing organisms. It is critical to keep raw foods separated and away from foods that are ready-to-eat… especially cooked and fresh foods that will receive no further heating. Here are ways to minimize cross-contamination from raw foods:

- When storing raw meats, poultry, and fish under refrigeration, keep them separated from each other.
- Use storage containers and equipment that prevents dripping to a product below.

If RAW animal foods are stored above one another, store as follows:	
Top shelf	*whole meat roasts*
Next shelf down	*raw shell eggs, fish, single pieces of meat*
Next shelf down	*ground meat*
Bottom shelf	*all poultry, and any stuffed meat or fish*

4. **Cook food to the required temperature.**

Different animal foods require different cooking temperatures because:

- different bacteria inhabit different animal foods;
- different bacteria react differently to heat;
- some illnesses are caused by very few bacteria, while other illnesses require a high number of bacteria; and
- heat penetrates differently into different foods.

Because of these differences, it is critical that FOOD SAFETY—*not just culinary preference*—MUST be considered when cooking raw animal foods. ALWAYS cook to these temperatures and verify with a thermometer:

- Raw shell eggs, fish, single pieces of meat   145°F for 15 sec
- Ground meat   155°F for 15 sec
- All poultry, and any stuffed meat or fish   165°F for 15 sec

    Contact the County of Santa Clara Department of Environmental Health for alternative time-temperature combinations.

5. **Keep it hot—Keep it cold—or—Don't keep it!**

High-risk food may be held safely ONLY when held at the proper temperatures. When held in the *"danger zone"—between 41°F and 135°F*—high-risk food can quickly become a bacterial breeding ground. So… keep hot food above 135°F and cold food below 41°F… or don't keep it.

- Don't leave high-risk food in the *danger zone* for more than 1 hour.
- Use these methods to cool foods quickly:
    - ✓ Separate foods into smaller or thinner portions.
    - ✓ Place foods in shallow containers; allow heat to escape by not covering.
    - ✓ Use rapid-cooling equipment such as cooling wands.
    - ✓ Use stainless steel food containers that transfer heat quickly.
    - ✓ Add ice as a food ingredient where recipes allow.
    - ✓ Place food containers in an ice bath, and stir frequently.
- Use a thermometer to check food temperatures often.