The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) estimates that roughly 48 million Americans get sick due to foodborne illness every year. Additionally, roughly 128,000 are hospitalized, and 3,000 actually die of foodborne diseases each year.

The food service industry has an obligation to do everything possible to mitigate these occurrences. Beyond the obvious ethical concerns, the fallout from a patron who gets sick from a foodborne illness possibly contracted at a given establishment can be significant. Concerns range from reputational to financial, and it’s important for proprietors to be prepared for anything.

Preventing foodborne illness ultimately comes down to two important areas: Cleanliness and temperature.

**Cleanliness**

Cleanliness is crucial to the prevention of food-related illness. Cross-contamination is a huge concern, as is the transfer of pathogens from one surface or food to another. You can avoid cross-contamination by avoiding bare-hand contact with ready-to-eat food. Additionally, to prevent cross-contamination between food-handling tasks, you should clean and sanitize food-contact surfaces. Beyond washing your hands and arms vigorously with soap frequently, there are a few important things to remember on the next page.
Cleanliness Tips

- Germs from raw meat can easily spread to cooked meat. Use separate plates for raw meat, poultry, or seafood and cooked meat, poultry, or seafood.

- Remember to store fruits and vegetables above any meats.

- Germs on your hands can contaminate the food that you or others eat. Always wash hands the right way, which is defined as at least 20 seconds with warm, soapy water.

- But *DON’T* wash raw meat, poultry or eggs. Doing so can spread harmful bacteria to your sink, countertops, and other surfaces in your kitchen.

While cleaning and sanitizing seem self-explanatory, here’s a “how” and “when” guide to doing both:

WHEN you should clean and sanitize food-contact surfaces:

1. After they are used
2. Any time food handlers are interrupted during a task and the items being used may have been contaminated
3. Before food handlers start working with a different type of food
4. After four hours if items are in constant use

HOW you should clean and sanitize food-contact surfaces:

1. Scrape or remove food bits from the surface
2. Wash the surface
3. Rinse the surface
4. Sanitize the surface
5. Allow the surface to air dry

Temperature

In any kind of food preparation, temperature is a critically important piece of the puzzle. Read on for some important temperature tips to keep in mind:
Temperature Tips

- Cooked food is safe only after it has been cooked to a temperature that will kill harmful bacteria. Use a reliable Safe Minimum Cooking Temperatures chart and a food thermometer.

- Harmful germs can multiply rapidly at room temperature. Thaw food safely in the refrigerator, in cold water or in the microwave, and always marinate meat or seafood in the refrigerator.

- Dangerous bacteria can grow in perishable foods within two hours unless you refrigerate them. Refrigerate perishable foods within two hours (or within one hour if the temperature is over 90 degrees Fahrenheit).

- The temperature danger zone is between 41 and 135 degrees — food in this temperature range is at high risk for bacterial growth.

- Poultry should be cooked at 165 degrees for at least 15 seconds, ground meat should be cooked at 155 degrees for at least 15 seconds, and seafood should be cooked at 145 degrees for at least 15 seconds.

Summary

While preventing foodborne illness is an ongoing battle, you can go a long way in the fight by always keeping temperature and cleanliness top of mind. Remember, you can’t taste (or smell or see) the bacteria that cause food poisoning. Tasting only a tiny amount can cause serious illness!

Society’s team of risk control experts take care of the details that will help business owners avoid catastrophic losses and keep their customers, employees and businesses protected. Get in touch with a Society agent today by visiting societyinsurance.com and learn more about how to best protect your business.

*-Credit The National Restaurant Association