

13 – LARGE 31 – small Food Safety Tips

You've taken steps to train and encourage employees to follow the best procedures to ensure your kitchen is storing, preparing and serving food that is high-quality and safe. Yet it is important to remain vigilant and continually enhance your culture of food safety.

According to the [U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention](#), the top contributing factors to food-borne illness include:

- Poor personal hygiene,
- Improper holding,
- Unsafe source,
- Inadequate cooking and
- Contaminated equipment/environment.

As you work toward making food safety practices simple and part of your culture, consider implementing some of these best practices.

Make hand-washing convenient

Proper hand-washing can be one of the best preventive measures you institute at your community. Making hand-washing easy for employees and incorporating it into the flow of food preparation can help you ensure that everyone has proper hand hygiene top of mind.

Install hand sinks within employees' sight, and keep supplies of soap and paper towels continuously stocked. Train and reinforce with your staff the [FDA Food Code](#) (in §2-301.13)-recommended hand-washing guidelines of washing hands for 20 seconds using soap and warm water.

Ensure proper cooler temperature control

Regularly verifying your cooler's internal temperature is critical. Setting your refrigerator to the proper temperature — the refrigerator should be at 40°F or below and the freezer at 0°F or below — is a [first step](#). Additionally, some refrigerators have built-in thermometers. If yours doesn't, then an appliance thermometer placed inside can provide an accurate reading.

Also important: Set up a system to monitor refrigerator temperatures on a regular basis, typically once per shift, to ensure that coolers are working properly. Then, as employees check the temperature, ask them to complete a chart, kept near the refrigerator, indicating date, time and temperature reading. Take corrective actions if proper temperatures are not achieved.

Know your vendors and suppliers

There are times when a potential contamination originates upstream. That is why it is important to know your vendors and suppliers, what type of food safety practices are in place and that their practices are up to code.

Develop a strong collaborative relationship so that you are both working toward your food safety goals.

Cook until done

Among the factors responsible for outbreaks of food-borne illness, inadequate cooking stands near the top of the list. Fortunately, it is a practice that easily can be corrected. Properly using a thermometer is a sure way to assess whether food has been heated to a high enough internal temperature to kill illness-inducing contaminants. Follow these recommended cooking temperatures from the [U.S. Food Code](#) in (§3-401.11):

- Raw poultry to a minimum temperature of 165°F.
- Raw ground meats to at least 158°F.
- Raw pork, fish, lamb, and whole pieces of beef to 145°F.

Clean, clean, clean ... and sanitize

Your strongest defense for food safety is a good offense, which means instituting regular cleaning with proper products for the surface and food soil.

After cleaning food contact surfaces, use an EPA-registered hard surface food contact surface sanitizer. Be sure to clean high-touch surfaces and items such as door handles, chairs and booths. Also, be mindful of non-food contact surfaces such as floors and drains, which also can harbor dangerous microorganisms and increase the risk of cross-contamination and food-borne illness.

Most importantly, read product labels and ask the advice of your local, state and federal regulatory agents. They can help you implement best practices and mitigate risks in case of a food-borne illness incident.

When it comes to ensuring that the food you serve is safe, don't underestimate the importance of maintaining your entire kitchen. A strategic partnership with vendors such as Ecolab can assist in identifying the right products, tools, processes and on-site training to ensure a properly implemented and executed food safety program. Taking this integrated approach and committing to staff training will help you continue to develop your culture of food safety and keep your residents safe and healthy.