The Holiday Season is Fast Approaching…Are you ready?

According to National Restaurant Association research, one in 10 Americans (11%) celebrate Thanksgiving Day by dining in one of the nation’s 945,000 restaurants and more than half (53 percent) of consumers use restaurant-prepared takeout items for all or part of their Thanksgiving Day meals. So what does this mean to you…. all food employees must remember to keep food safety as their top priority by emphasizing the importance of:

- Employee Health and Handwashing
- Time-Temperature Control
- Preventing Cross Contamination

In this issue we will be focusing on preventing foodborne illness so that we all enjoy the holidays.

“Prevent Foodborne Illness Outbreaks” Brochure

Did you know that sick employees and poor hygiene practices are major causes of foodborne illness outbreaks? By working together, we can reduce the likelihood that certain viruses and bacteria will not be transmitted from an infected employee into food.

As a food business, the California Health and Safety Code clearly identifies responsibilities of employers and employees working in food facilities.

- It is the responsibility of a food employee to inform the person in charge if they are sick.
- It is the responsibility of the person in charge to notify Orange County Environmental Health if a disease or outbreak is suspected.

To assist you and your employees in becoming familiar with these regulations, we have developed the “Prevent Foodborne Illness Outbreaks” brochure. Please visit our website at ocfoodinfo.com or call (714) 433-6000 for a copy of the brochure.

Frequently Asked Questions

The following are a few questions that food operators may have when involved in investigations of foodborne illness cases:

Q I know foodborne illness means becoming ill from contaminated food but what does foodborne illness outbreak mean?
A Foodborne illness outbreaks are when two or more people from separate households eat a common food and experience similar illness or when two or more people eat a common meal and become ill from the same pathogen or toxin.

Q During a foodborne illness investigation, my inspector asked for a lot of documents. Why is that?
A Documents such as purchase receipts, tags or labels are part of our trace back investigation. These documents will help our inspector learn about your food distributors, importers, producers, and/or processors, which can play a big role in identifying the source of a foodborne illness.

Q I have been in business for many years and I have never made anyone sick. How do you know my food made people sick?
A Our goal is to partner with the business operator and our epidemiologists and investigate the alleged foodborne illness with the ultimate goal in preventing ongoing disease transmission. This does not mean the food served from your facility made people sick.

Q Is there a conclusion to environmental health foodborne illness investigation?
A Unfortunately not in most cases. Many times, illnesses are reported long after the event or there is lack of evidence to support the cause of the illness. Inspectors only document collected information and observations.
Food Donations

Instead of disposing of excess food from your business, consider donating to a hunger relief organization.

Donating food is easier than you think. Together we can be a part of ending hunger in Orange County. To learn more about food donations, pick up the phone and contact our Waste Not OC coalition partner at (855) 700-9662 or visit www.Wastenotoc.org.

Frequently Asked Questions continued...

Q: Is a food borne illness investigation report public record?
A: Yes. Even though the Foodborne illness investigation report is not posted on our website, it can be requested through our record request department (http://ochealthinfo.com/eh/home/records).

Q: What do I do if I receive foodborne illness afterhours calls from my customers?
A: You can call our foodborne illness hotline phone number (714) 433-6418 and leave a message. A supervisor on duty routinely checks this hotline. Make sure to leave your contact information so the supervisor can return your call.

The Art of Handwashing

One of the major components of Environmental Health’s new handwashing campaign, “The Art of Handwashing” is the creation of an oral-culture storyboard. What is an oral-culture storyboard? Research by FDA’s Oral Culture Learner Project* has found that food employees are mostly visual learners. Pictures rather than words make it easier for food employees to understand the important role they play in preventing foodborne illness. The “Clean Hands Healthy Lives” oral-culture storyboard poster relies mostly on photographs and minimal text. The poster shows the consequences of improper versus proper handwashing. The poster is available in five different languages, including English, Korean, Spanish, Traditional Chinese, and Vietnamese, and will be distributed by Environmental Health Specialists during our routine inspections.

Home Food Safety Myth Busters

Based on Center for Disease Control and Prevention, each year an estimated 48 million Americans get sick from eating contaminated or improperly prepared foods. Many of these people get sick from foods prepared in their home. All foods, regardless of the way they were produced, need to be handled and stored properly to prevent the growth of harmful bacteria that can cause foodborne illness. Over the years we have all heard advice related to food safety and preparation, much of it from word of mouth. What are some of those home food safety myths we have come to believe that are NOT true? You can protect yourself against foodborne illness by getting the correct information. View EH’s new video at ocfoodinfo.com, where some common myths about home food safety are debunked once and for all. Some might surprise you. Let’s see how many you know! Feel free to share these myths and facts with your friends, families and community.

*http://www.fda.gov/Food/GuidanceRegulation/RetailFoodProtection/IndustryandRegulatoryAssistanceandTrainingResources/ucm212661.htm