Food Handler’s Manual

A Guide to Safe & Healthy Food Handling for Food Establishments

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While the food supply in the United States is one of the safest in the world, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention estimates that 76 million people get sick, more than 300,000 are hospitalized, and 5,000 Americans die each year from foodborne illness. Preventing foodborne illness and death remains a major public health challenge.

In addition, CDC estimates that foodborne illness costs the country $6.9 billion every year.

-Centers for Disease Control and Prevention website (http://www.cdc.gov/foodsafety/)

Every year in this country, millions of people get sick from the food they eat. Most of these illnesses can be prevented.

This manual is designed to provide food service operators, management, and personnel with safe food handling guidelines in order to reduce the risk of foodborne illnesses. Foodborne illness may devastate a community and take a serious financial toll on the food industry.

Do your part by following food safety guidelines every day.
Operator Responsibilities

- Be the person in charge when at the establishment.
- Appoint a person in charge whenever the operator is out of the establishment.
- Submit plans to the Health Department for any remodeling or significant changes in the menu, prior to the change.
- Submit to the Health Department a properly prepared HACCP plan prior to engaging in using reduced oxygen packaging.

Person in Charge

There must be a person in charge at a retail food establishment at all times it is in operation. Their responsibilities include:

- Have and demonstrate knowledge of food safety.
- Ensure that food supplies are from a reputable and commercial source.
- Exclude persons not necessary to the operation from food prep, food storage and warewashing areas.
- Monitoring of employee hygiene, health and handwashing.
- Daily oversight of cooking temperatures for potentially hazardous foods.
- Daily oversight of food temperatures during cold holding, cooling, and hot holding.
- Routine monitoring of sanitizing methods and equipment.
- Ensure that employees are preventing potential contamination of ready to eat foods with their bare hands.
- Ensure that food employees are properly trained in food safety as it relates to their assigned duties.
- Immediately take remedial action and notify the Health Department of any imminent health hazard, such as fire, flooding, loss of electricity or water (if water or electric is out for more than 30 minutes), sewage back-ups, foodborne illness outbreak, misuse of chemicals, etc.
- Advising consumers about allergens, upon an inquiry.
- Ensuring that consumers are notified that clean tableware is to be used when they return to self-service areas such as a salad bar or buffet.
Why Proper Food Handling is So Important

Viruses and bacteria account for 98% of foodborne illness (viruses: 80%; bacteria: 18%). Some common viruses that may cause foodborne illness include Hepatitis A and Norovirus. These viruses are primarily passed on from stool to mouth (fecal-oral route), which makes thorough handwashing extremely important. Viruses can be carried by any food. Viruses do not grow on food.

Some common bacteria that may cause foodborne illness include Salmonella sp., E. coli 0157:H7, Shigella, Staphylococcus aureus, Bacillus cereus, Clostridium perfringens, Clostridium botulinum, Campylobacter jejuni, Listeria and many others. Bacteria can grow in “potentially hazardous food if not handled properly. Bacteria have rapid growth rates; under optimal conditions, they split in 2 every 20 to 30 minutes. This makes temperature controls and food safety extremely important.

“Potentially hazardous food” is defined as:
Any food or food ingredient that is capable of supporting the rapid and progressive growth of infectious or toxigenic microorganisms (ones that produce toxins).

To be potentially hazardous, a food must be:

1. Moist
2. Non-acidic (pH at or above 4.6)
3. A food source for bacteria (high protein best)

Some potentially hazardous foods include:

- All meats
- Dairy products
- Eggs
- Cooked vegetables
- Tofu, tempeh, soymilk
- Cooked beans, pastas, grains
- Cooked rice
- Raw seed sprouts (alfalfa sprouts, bean sprouts, etc.)
- Garlic, onion, or herbs in oil
- Cut melons
Temperature Controls

Proper temperature controls and food handling practices are extremely important to prevent the growth of bacteria in potentially hazardous foods.

The “Danger Zone” is the temperature range between 41°F and 135°F. Bacteria grow very rapidly in the Danger Zone. For this reason, proper cooling, reheating, cold-holding, hot-holding, and cooking temperatures should be carefully monitored.

Temperature Logs:
We recommend use of temperature charts or logs to record and verify proper temperature.

✓ Check and record temperatures every 2 hours.
✓ Monitor both food temperatures and equipment thermometer readings.

Cold-holding:
Cold food must be maintained cold at 41°F or less at all times. This includes refrigeration, salad bars, and during transport.

Hot-holding:
Hot food must be maintained hot at 135°F or more at all times. This includes steam tables, stove tops, heating cabinets, and during transport.

Minimum Required Cooking Temperatures
All raw products are required to reach an internal temperature reading as follows:

• Poultry and any Stuffing (including crabmeat or cheese) : 165°F for 15 seconds

• Ground Beef and pooled eggs: 155°F for 15 seconds

• Fish, Shellfish, Eggs, Pork and ‘other’ meats: 145°F for 15 seconds

• Rare Beef Steak or Beef Roast: 130°F for 112 minutes
Cooling Procedures

Foods must be cooled as quickly as possible to prevent the growth of bacteria as the food drops through the Danger Zone.

∗ For hot food:

Cool from 135°F to 70 °F in 2 hours or less; and then From 70 °F to 41 °F in 4 hours or less.

∗ For foods prepared at room temperature or using room temperature ingredients (i.e. tuna salad, cut melon, sliced deli meats, etc.):

Cool from 70 °F to 41 °F in 4 hours or less.

Cooling Methods:

• Refrigeration
  ✓ Divide food into smaller portions (small portions cool faster than large portions)
  ✓ Use shallow 2”-4” pans spaced to allow air flow around pans
  ✓ Do not cover until food reaches 41°F
  ✓ Use containers that transfer heat e.g. metal pans

• Ice bath
  ✓ Fill ice and water up to the level of food in the container
  ✓ Stir regularly

• Ice paddles
  ✓ Best for soups, gravies, other thin foods
  ✓ Use ice paddle along with the refrigeration method or ice bath method
  ✓ Place in cooling food upon reaching 135°C F. Hotter foods will crack the plastic.

• Use Ice as an ingredient instead of water
Reheating
After cooling, all leftovers and pre-made foods must be reheated to a minimum of 165°F within 2 hours if placing in hot holding. If reheating a commercially made food for the first time, reheat to a minimum of 135°F within 2 hours if placing in hot holding. For a food that will be consumed immediately, it can be reheated to any temperature.

Approved Methods:
1. Stove
2. Oven
3. Microwave
4. Other rapid-heating equipment

When using microwaves:
1. Cover
2. Stir
3. Wait 2 minutes before checking temperature and serving.
Do not reheat foods on steam tables or other hot-holding equipment.

Thermometers
Every food service establishment must have metal-stem thermometers for monitoring food temperatures and refrigerator thermometers for monitoring the temperature inside refrigeration units. Establishments cooking thin foods, such as hamburgers or fish filets, must also have a small diameter thermocouple or thermistor, which takes temperatures on the tip. All must be accurate and calibrated regularly.

To calibrate metal-stem thermometers:
1. Place thermometer stem in a glass filled with ice and some water.
2. Wait 15-20 seconds; if thermometer does not read 32°F, it must be calibrated.

To adjust an inaccurate dial thermometer:
Use pliers/wrench (some thermometer sleeves have one built in) and adjust the nut on the underside of the thermometer face until it reads 32°F while in the ice water.

Inaccurate digital thermometers may be adjusted by the manufacturer, some can be field calibrated, or they may have to be replaced.

- Daily thermometer calibration is recommended.
- Thermometers should also be re-calibrated whenever dropped or subjected to extreme temperatures.
Employee Hygiene

Handwashing
Proper handwashing is the single most effective way to stop the spread of disease.

Always wash hands when:
1. Entering the kitchen.
2. Returning from the restroom.
3. Handling raw meat, poultry, fish, or eggs.
4. Touching face, sneezing in hands.
5. Handling dirty dishes.
6. Putting on new gloves.
7. Any time hands may be contaminated.

Proper Method for Washing Hands: (minimum total wash time= 20 seconds)
✓ Wet hands with water
✓ Rub hands vigorously with soap and warm water for at least 10 seconds.
✓ Rinse well
✓ Dry thoroughly with paper towel.
  o Turn off faucet handles with paper towel.
  o Use a paper towel to turn the door handle when exiting the lavatory.

Handwashing sinks must be used for handwashing ONLY and must be stocked with:
✓ Hot and cold running water (or warm 90ºF to 110º F)
✓ Soap
✓ Paper towels or air dryer

*Do not block handwashing sinks or use these sinks for any other purpose (i.e. dumping liquids, rinsing containers, filling sanitizer buckets, filling water pitchers, etc.).

Hand sanitizers only work on clean hands and do not kill Norovirus or Hepatitis A. Thus, they are not required in a retail food establishment. Hand sanitizers should never be used instead of handwashing.

Just rinsing your hands with water does nothing to remove germs! You must use soap!
Bare-Hand Contact
You must prevent bare-hand contact when handling ready-to-eat foods (i.e. salads, fruit, pizza, sandwiches, sushi, etc.). You may prevent bare-hand contact by using single-use gloves, utensils, deli tissue, etc.

Ready-to-eat foods are foods that do not require further cooking or heating before being served. These foods are most at risk for transmitting fecal-oral diseases (i.e. viruses, including Hepatitis A and Norovirus) that come from contaminated hands.

Some ready-to-eat foods include:
- Salads
- Fresh fruits and vegetables (includes lemons)
- Pizza
- Sandwiches
- Cheese
- Sushi
- Beverages, ice
- Cookies and pastries

Gloves
- Always wash your hands before putting on a new pair of gloves.
- Change your gloves and wash your hands whenever the gloves become contaminated:
  - After handling raw meat, poultry, fish, or eggs
  - After touching your face with a glove or sneezing/coughing into the glove.
  - After touching unclean dishes or trash cans
  - Whenever changing tasks
- Gloves must be worn over any bandage, cut, burn, or sore.
- Gloves should be considered an extension of your hands.
- Gloves are not a substitute for good handwashing practices!

Highly susceptible populations
Although anyone can get sick from food handled unsafely, certain people are more likely to become seriously ill and at a greater frequency. These people are called “highly susceptible”. They include:

- Pre-school children
- Older adults in a facility that provides health care or assisted living
- Immunocompromised persons in a hospital or nursing home

There are a few additional regulations if your main population is highly susceptible. Please refer to NJAC 8:24-3.7 for those details. This code can be found at http://www.vldhealth.org/EnvironmentalService.htm#retailfood
Sick Employees

Sick employees may be at high risk for contaminating food and utensils with bacteria or viruses. For this reason, sick employees must be *restricted or **excluded from working in the kitchen with food and foodservice equipment.

Employees must be restricted or excluded if demonstrating any of the following symptoms:

✓ Diarrhea
✓ Vomiting
✓ Fever
✓ Jaundice
✓ Sore throat with fever
✓ Infected cuts/lesions on hands, wrists
✓ Persistent coughing, sneezing, runny nose

*"Restrict" means to limit the activity of a food employee so that there is no risk of transmitting a disease that is transmissible through food and the food employee does not work with exposed food, clean equipment, utensils, linens or unwrapped single-service items.

**“Exclude” means to prevent the person from working as a food employee or entering the non-public areas of a retail food establishment. Establishments serving a highly susceptible population must exclude.

Any employees diagnosed with the following illnesses must not work in any area of a food establishment in any capacity where there is likelihood that food, food contact surfaces or other persons will be contaminated with the pathogenic organism:

Salmonella                                  Hepatitis A
Staphylococcal intoxication                 Strep throat
Shigella spp.                                Acute respiratory infection
Shiga toxin producing E. coli

Food Worker Policies

All employees must maintain good hygienic practices.

- Employees may **consume food and smoke only in areas away from food and utensils.**
- **Drinks** may be stored in clean **closed containers** that do not contaminate hands. Drinks must be **stored below and separate from food, prep surfaces, utensils, etc.**
- Food workers must wear **hair restraints and clean outer clothing.**
- Food workers must have **fingernails kept trimmed and clean; no jewelry shall be worn on hands or arms, except a plain wedding band.**
- **Aprons** must be removed before entering the restroom or leaving the food prep area.
- **Cloth towels and aprons must not be used for wiping hands.**
Food Preparation

Rinse all fruits and vegetables thoroughly
Increasing numbers of foodborne outbreaks have been occurring in recent years due to contaminated produce.

• All produce should be rinsed thoroughly in a clean, approved sink using a colander and cold running water.
  Note: Wash-rinse-sanitize the prep sink before use.

• Rinse produce before cutting or preparing (including lemons, melons, onions, avocado, mushrooms, cabbage, lettuce, squash, etc.)

Cross-Contamination
Cross-contamination is the possible spread of bacteria from a contaminated source (raw chicken, meats, fish, eggs; contaminated utensils and equipment, etc.) to another food or surface.

Prevent cross-contamination:
* Store raw meats, poultry, fish, and eggs on the bottom shelf of the refrigerator, below and separate from all other foods.
  • Use a drip pan under raw meat, poultry, fish, or egg products.
  
  • Change your gloves and wash hands after handling any raw meat, poultry, fish, or eggs.

Wash, rinse, and sanitize all cutting boards, knives, utensils, prep tables, sinks, etc. after working with raw meat products and before preparing any other foods.

Wash, rinse, and sanitize all work surfaces, including cutting boards, sinks, prep tables, slicers, utensils, etc. at least every 4 hours during continued use.
Food Quality/Sources

All food in food service establishments must be obtained from an approved source.

- **Verify** that your supplier has documentation showing that it is an approved wholesale facility.

- **All meats, poultry, and eggs** must have the USDA stamp of approval on the packaging.

- **Fish to be used for sushi or considered sushi-quality** must have a letter from your supplier verifying that required freezing techniques have been performed, unless you can conduct this step yourself properly.

- **Shellfish** must come from approved harvest sites and have completed, attached tags. Maintain all shellfish tags for a minimum of 90 days after the last portion is served. You should mark the date on each tag when the product was finished.

- **Do not use raw eggs in any ready-to-eat food items** (foods that do not require adequate cooking). Pasteurized eggs may be used as a substitute for raw eggs in recipes (i.e. caesar salad dressing, dessert mousse, tiramisu, etc.).

Ensure that all food is wholesome and free of spoilage:

- **Check cans** for dents, swelling or leaks upon delivery. Reject them if you find a problem. Do not ever use a swollen or leaking can! Home canned foods may not be used at all.

- **Check food temperatures and food quality** upon delivery:
  
  Reject questionable items.
  
  Cold food must be 41°F when delivered, except for milk eggs and shellfish, which can be delivered at 45°F.

- **Do not use moldy or spoiled foods.** Discard them immediately.

- **Sell-by or use-by dates** should be observed and may not be altered or covered in any way.

- **Store food in a protected manner:**
  
  - All food should be at least 6” above the floor.
  
  - Cover and label food in dry storage areas.
  
  - Never store food beneath or near chemicals, wastewater lines, tools, or any other possible source of contamination.
  
  - Store canned goods at 86°F or less.
On-site Food Labeling
What are you required to do?

Note: All labels must be in English.

Raw meats and poultry that are packaged on-site for customer selection must always contain this label.

Prepared Foods that you make on site and pre-package must contain a label with the following information:

- **Product Name** (common name)
- **Business name/address** (you made it) (street address can be deleted if the business address is in the phone book)
- **Ingredient list** (from most to least in weight)
- **Product net weight in ounces or pounds AND grams or liters**
- **Allergens** must appear on a label in 1 of 3 ways: (soy, milk, eggs, shellfish, fish, peanuts, tree nuts, or wheat)
  1. List in name or ingredient list
  2. List in ingredient list if it does not disclose what it is: example: flour (wheat)
  3. List after the word “Contains”: ex. Contains egg.

Repackaging bulk foods to smaller amounts prior to customer selection requires a label with the following information:

- **Common name of food**
- **Ingredient list** (from most to least in weight)
- **Net weight** as described above
- “Packed by” (your business/address) or the **manufacturer’s name** and address
- **Allergens**, if present, as described above

NOTE: A proper food label is required if any food is pre-packaged and available for self-service (except at a buffet or cafeteria line) or if you are making a health or nutrient claim about the food.

(Document created solely by the Vineland Health Department)
Cleaning and Sanitizing

Dishwashing

Cleaning is the removal of dirt, soil, and debris. Sanitizing is the reduction of disease-causing microorganisms.

All food service equipment - utensils, plates, bowls, prep tables, sinks, cutting boards, slicers, food processors, mixers, and anything else used to prepare food - must be washed, rinsed, and then sanitized:

• At least every 4 hours during continued use.
• Every time raw meat, poultry, fish, or eggs are prepared.

*Clean solutions of warm soapy water, rinse water, and sanitizer solution must be prepared regularly and always after cleaning utensils, cutting boards, etc. are used for raw meat preparation.

Whether washing dishes in a 3-compartment sink or in a mechanical dishwasher, the same steps must be followed:

Scrape - Wash – Rinse – Sanitize – Air Dry

Do not dry anything with a cloth towel!

Sanitizers

Sanitizers are used to reduce the number of pathogens that may be found on food service equipment to safe levels. Chemical sanitizers and hot water sanitization are both approved methods for sanitizing equipment.

Approved chemical sanitizers and concentrations:

• Chlorine (bleach): 50-100 ppm (200 ppm is the maximum concentration permitted; above 200 ppm is considered toxic).
• Quaternary ammonium: 200 ppm (unless otherwise specified by the manufacturer).
• Iodine: 12.5-25 ppm (Above 25 ppm is considered toxic.)

Minimum 10-second contact time required with chlorine sanitizers and 30 seconds for quaternary ammonia or iodine.

Test strips must be used to check for proper sanitizer concentrations.

For hot water sanitizing the surface of the dishes must reach 160°F. This usually means the dial must reach 180°F.
Storage

In-use utensil storage
Utensils in the process of being used for food preparation may be stored:

- In the food with the handle up, out of the food.
- On a clean, dry surface.
- In water 135°F or more.
- In an approved dipper well (running water)
- NEVER store in-use utensils in sanitizer or room-temperature water.

Storage and Use of Wiping Cloths
In-use wiping cloths should be stored in clean sanitizer solution between uses.

Separate buckets of sanitizer must be provided for wiping off:

- Raw meat prep areas
- Non-food contact areas (counters, dining tables)
- Food-contact areas (cutting boards, prep tables, etc.)

- Clean soapy water, rinse water, and sanitizer solution are necessary for cleaning in-place equipment (slicers, prep tables, etc.).
- Wiping a surface with a sanitized cloth is NOT cleaning and sanitizing!
- Wiping cloths are to be used to clean up spills and food debris only.

Chemical Storage
Chemical contamination of food may cause serious injury to the consumer.

Ensure that all chemicals are stored:

- Below and separate from food and food-contact surfaces (i.e. prep areas, utensils, etc.).
- In a designated chemical storage area.
- In correctly labeled containers.
- Only chemicals approved for food establishment operation are permitted on the premises. All chemicals must be used according to manufacturer specifications.
- Do not use chemical bottles for food (oil, water, etc.) or food containers for chemicals.
Facility and Equipment

Pests
Control pests in the food service establishment by using:

- A professional exterminator
- Approved traps
- Tightly sealed openings, screen doors and fly fans
- Never apply pesticides in a food service establishment unless you are a NJ Certified Pesticide Applicator.

Equipment Cleaning and Maintenance
Food service equipment operates best when it is maintained in good condition and kept clean. The build-up of food debris and grease on equipment and in the food service establishment may attract pests and otherwise create unsanitary conditions. Regular cleaning schedules should be maintained in order to keep the following equipment clean and in good condition:

- Ice machine
- Refrigeration interiors and exteriors (including shelves, compressor coils, fan covers, door gaskets)
- Fryers
- Grill equipment
- Ovens
- Hoods
- Steamers
- Beverage machines (soda nozzles, ice chutes)
- All other kitchen equipment

Approved Equipment
All foodservice utensils and equipment must be approved for use in a retail food establishment:

- No copper, enamelware, or pewter may be used in contact with food.
- Hardwoods may be used for cutting surfaces (not for other food-contact surfaces, like spoons).
- Cast iron may be used for cooking only.
- All ceramics, china, crystal, and hand-painted ceramics must be lead-free.
General Facility Maintenance

Food service establishments must be kept in good sanitary condition, both inside and outside of the facility.

- **Floors, walls, and ceilings** should be maintained clean and in good repair.
- **Lighting** should be maintained and provide the following levels of light:
  - 50 foot-candles of covered or otherwise shatter-resistant light above food preparation and dishwashing areas
  - 20 foot-candles at utensil storage areas and in toilet and lavatory areas
  - 10 foot-candles in other areas, including dry storage areas
- **Garbage and refuse** containers should be kept clean and inaccessible to rodents, insects, and other vermin.
- All **sewage** systems must be properly operating. Sewage back-ups create an imminent health hazard and must be immediately remedied:
  - Contact a licensed plumber.
  - Close the kitchen or area with the back-up until it is repaired.
- **Restrooms** should be kept clean and stocked with toilet paper, soap, and paper towels or approved hand-drying devices.
- **Clean linen** must be stored in a clean, dry area and protected from contamination (chemicals, wastewater lines, etc.).
- **Laundry facilities (washer and dryer)** must be kept clean and located separately from food preparation areas. After washing, linen should be thoroughly dried in a mechanical dryer. Dirty linen baskets must be used for storage of dirty liner and should be maintained in good condition.
- Any water fixture that has a **threaded faucet** and hose attachment must have an approved **backflow prevention device**.
- **Plumbing** should be in good condition and free of leaks, duct-tape, plastic wrap, or other unapproved repair materials.
- **Mop sinks** must be provided at all retail food establishments and used for disposal of mop water and chemicals. These sinks may not be used for any other purpose (dishwashing, food preparation, handwashing). They must be kept clean and in good condition.
- **Grease traps** must be kept clean and operating properly. They must be regularly pumped by an approved waste disposal company or in a method that does not contaminate the facility or outside area.

Self-Inspection

Self-inspections are a great tool for management and staff to use to make sure their facility is following good practices. This also helps to prepare the facility for regular inspections by the Health Department.

**In order to conduct a self-inspection, you will need:**

- A self-inspection form, clipboard, and pen
- A calibrated metal-stem thermometer and/or a thin-probe thermometer
- Test strips for sanitizer
- A flashlight (for better viewing of dark corners, equipment interiors, etc.)
Allergens
Food allergies are very serious. The 8 major food allergens are: dairy products, eggs, seafood, shellfish, wheat, soy, tree nuts and peanuts. Be aware of where these ingredients are used in your food items. Always be sure and honest if a customer inquires. A wrong answer could kill your customer. If a customer advises you of a food allergy, you must also prevent accidental contamination. For more information on how to safely prepare items for customers with food allergies, please go to www.foodallergy.com. If you have a customer with an allergic reaction, always call 911.

Thank You
Your role in food safety is an important one. As a food worker or manager, it is your responsibility to make sure that the food you serve is safe to eat. Your customers count on you to prepare their food in a clean and sanitary manner.

We appreciate that by reading this manual, you are taking an active role in learning how to safely prepare and serve food for the public. In addition to this manual, the Vineland Health Department offers food safety classes and various other resources. Visit our website at www.vldhealth.org to learn more about these educational opportunities or contact us at:

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The information provided in this manual is based on the New Jersey Retail Food Establishment regulations, but does not represent all requirements of the established regulations. To download a copy of the New Jersey Retail Food Establishment Regulations, visit our website or contact us at the address listed above.

References and Additional Resources

1. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) http://www.cdc.gov  
2. U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA) http://www.cfsan.fda.gov/list.html  
6. Fight BAC organization http://www.fightbac.org  
7. New Jersey Department of Health www.state.nj.us/health/ehoh/foodweb  
8. For information on foodborne illnesses: http://vm.cfsan.fda.gov/~mow/intro.html

(Adapted from Boulder County Public Health, Boulder, Colorado)