

FOOD-BORNE ILLNESS OUTBREAKS

A food-borne illness outbreak can harm a restaurant's reputation and greatly affect your bottom line...but with proper safety precautions an outbreak may be avoided, or damages minimized with swift action after an outbreak. Here are some tips to reduce the risks for your employees and your business.

What to Do During a Suspected Food-borne Illness Outbreak

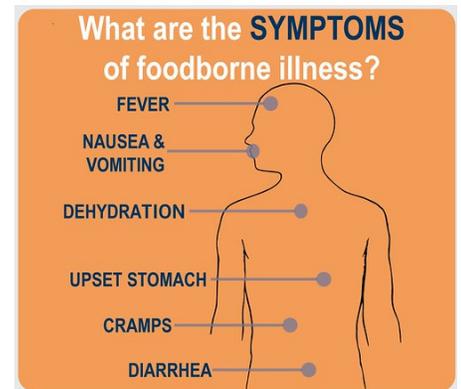
1. Discontinue operations - Without an investigation, you can't be sure which food items are at risk. Closing your establishment is recommended until you have approval to reopen.

2. Do not discard any food - Food, equipment, and other evidence in your establishment can provide valuable clues in determining the source of the outbreak.

3. Notify the local regulatory authority - Explain the situation clearly and honestly; being open and involved early on will demonstrate your willingness to work together with the authorities to resume business operations.

4. Comply with investigations -The authorities that will look into the outbreak have the same goal as you: to identify and prevent foodborne illness. Help them by following their instructions, taking their investigation seriously, and encouraging your employees to comply fully. Remember that, as difficult as the situation is for your business, identifying and stopping the cause of foodborne illness can potentially save lives.

5. When approval is granted, resume operations - Once the regulatory authority gives you permission, you may continue to serve your customers. Make sure to implement any safety practices recommended by the authority to keep your establishment from experiencing another outbreak. You may need to reassure customers of your establishment's safety, but being honest and professional throughout the process will help them to understand your commitment to their health and safety (see page 2 for more guidelines).



WHAT CAUSES FOOD-BORNE ILLNESS?

The five major factors that contribute to food-borne illness are:

- Improper holding temperatures
- Inadequate cooking
- Contaminated equipment
- Food from unsafe sources
- Poor personal hygiene

MOST COMMON FOOD-BORNE ILLNESSES

Food safety experts have identified six pathogens that are easily transmitted through food and cause severe illness. They are:

- Salmonella (*Salmonella enterica*):
- Shigella (*Shigella dysenteriae*)
- E. coli (*Escherichia coli*)
- Hepatitis A (*Hepatitis A virus*)
- Norovirus (Norwalk Virus)
- Listeria (*Listeria monocytogenes*)

HOW TO PREVENT FOODBORNE ILLNESS

The five major factors that contribute to food-borne illness are:

- Clean: Wash hands and surfaces often.
- Separate: Don't cross-contaminate.
- Cook: Cook to proper temperatures.
- Chill: Refrigerate promptly.

TIPS FOR PUBLIC RELATIONS & MEDIA COVERAGE DURING A FOOD-BORNE ILLNESS OUTBREAK

It's important to remember your greatest responsibility as business owner is the safety of your customers and employees. Business and profits must take a back seat in these situations....health and welfare of the community must be addressed during a food-borne illness outbreak.

1. Crisis communications plans should be completed and on file - and updated annually. Some items to focus on in your crisis plan include:

- A basic holding statement that you can personalize to fit the situation. Remember, any statement you make should show sincerity and concern for all people involved.
- Appropriate contacts for the situation, including the health department, police, insurance carriers, etc.
- A media representative/point of contact.. Depending on the size and type of restaurant, it might be the owner, the general manager, the HR manager, or a security and safety employee. Everyone, including employees, should be able to identify the media point-of-contact within the company.

2. Media Outreach & Interviews

- Stay calm, professional, and refer to your crisis communication plan and appointed internal media representative to devise an action plan.
- Do not allow filming inside your restaurant (out of respect for guest and employee privacy). Instead, try to speak with reporters and interviewers outside of the building.
- Be honest about the steps you've taken to combat the problem. Focus on the positives: food safety education/training, swift action once the problem was identified, and appropriate actions to resolve the crisis.
- Try to avoid the phrase "no comment" - instead direct all inquiries to your internal media representative to handle all inquiries and interview requests.
- Consider releasing a planned statement to the media, which can be used as "comment" from ownership, on your website, and communicated internally to employees.. Plan to use this statement across the board and encourage employees to repost and use this statement, rather than allowing all staff to make their own comments and arguments. One cohesive statement and on-brand messaging allows your company's voice to shine through , and discourages a lot of "he said/she said" and mixed messages that can occur on social media and other platforms. Consider devising short statements that can be used by staff once your establishment re-opens, when they are met with the inevitable questions about the situation.

1 in 6 
Americans each year suffer a foodborne disease (CDC)

2 Million 
Annual deaths in emerging areas due to foodborne infections

3,000 
Annual foodborne disease deaths in U.S. (CDC)

\$80 Billion 
Annual cost of losses and illness caused by foodborne disease

DRA Resources & Food Safety Training



ServSafe Food Handler

This training is intended to create and reinforce a statewide standard for safe food handling in food service establishments. It helps educate employees on the basic principles of food safety and can help prevent disease and food-borne illness outbreaks. Classes are available online or in-person and can be completed quickly by all staff members.

<http://www.delawarerestaurant.org/education/servsafe/servsafe-food-handler-training/>

ServSafe Manager Class

ServSafe® meets the requirements for food safety training mandated by the state of Delaware. It covers critical principles from the latest Food Code, including personal hygiene, cross contamination, time and temperature, receiving and storage, food safety management systems and training hourly employees. Classes available online or in-person, with proctored exams offered through the DRA.

<http://www.delawarerestaurant.org/education/servsafe>

OTHER RESOURCES

Center for Disease Control and Prevention

<https://www.cdc.gov/foodsafety/index.html>

Stop Foodborne Illness Official Page

<https://stopfoodborneillness.org/>

Department of Health and Social Services

<https://www.dhss.delaware.gov/>

Institute for Public

<https://instituteforpr.org/crisis-management-and-communications/>

Examples of Success & Failure During Outbreaks of Food-Borne Illness

https://www.sagepub.com/sites/default/files/upm-binaries/10988_Chapter_6.pdf