

FOOD FOCUS

JANUARY 1, 2006

WHAT IS LISTERIA?

Listeria monocytogenes is a bacterium found in soil and water. Vegetables can become contaminated from the soil or from manure used as fertilizer. Animals can carry the bacteria without appearing ill and can contaminate food such as meats and dairy products. The bacteria has been found in a variety of raw foods such as uncooked meats and vegetables, as well as in processed foods that become contaminated after processing like soft cheeses and cold cuts at the deli counter. Unpasteurized (raw) milk or foods made from unpasteurized milk may also contain the bacteria.

This pathogen causes nearly 2,500 cases of listeriosis per year in the United States. It primarily affects pregnant women, newborns, and adults with weakened immune systems. *Listeria* is killed by pasteurization and cooking; however, in certain ready-to-eat foods such as hot dogs and deli meats, contamination may occur after cooking but before packaging.

Listeria can grow at very low temperatures (38°F), which is why it is so important to discard leftovers after seven (7) days. This can be tracked by proper date labeling of high risk foods.

Preventative Measures Include:

- Thoroughly cooking raw food from animal sources such as beef, pork, or poultry.
- Washing raw vegetables thoroughly before eating.
- Keeping uncooked meats separate from vegetables, from cooked foods, and from ready-to-eat foods.
- Avoiding unpasteurized (raw) milk or foods made from unpasteurized milk.
- Washing hands, knives, and cutting boards after handling uncooked foods.
- Consuming perishable and ready-to-eat foods as soon as possible.

FRUITS & VEGETABLES

Things to remember when preparing fruits and vegetables (produce):

- The best way to thoroughly wash fruits and vegetables is to gently rub the item under clean running tap water.
- If the produce is firm enough (like potatoes and squashes) and the skin will be eaten, then a scrub brush should be used.
- All produce such as oranges and melons should be washed even when the skin and rind will not be eaten.
- Do not use detergents or bleaches as they may stay on the surface and might be absorbed into the produce.
- Take off the outer leaves of leafy vegetables such as lettuce and cabbage before washing. Rinse leaves individually under running tap water and place in a salad spinner to dry.
- Cut out any bruised areas of the produce because bacteria may grow and cause illness if consumed.
- Keep raw meats separate from fresh produce. Use different cutting boards, knives, and utensils for preparing these items.
- Always wash cutting boards, knives, utensils, and your hands after handling raw meats and before handling fresh fruits and vegetables.

Personal Hygiene Quiz — True or False

1. ___ It is not necessary to bathe daily.
2. ___ If you are sick, you should call your supervisor.
3. ___ You should change your uniform at least 3 times weekly.
4. ___ Disposable gloves are a good substitute for hand washing.
5. ___ You can determine if a food is hot or cold enough by touching the food.

Answers are on Page 2.

Date Labeling vs. Time Dating

Date Labeling

Prepared food may be kept for 7 days after initial preparation if it is held constantly at 41°F during that time. When the product is initially placed into refrigerated storage, a date must be placed on the container. There are 2 ways to mark the dates:

- (1) **Throw away within 7 days from date marked**—use the current (today's) date; or
- (2) **Throw away by date marked**—use a date 7 days from the current (today's) date.

Time Dating

When a food is taken out of refrigeration and its temperature was not maintained at 41° or less during storage, the time the product is taken out must be recorded. Then it must be used or thrown away within 4 hours of the time marked. If your establishment uses time-dating procedures, the written procedures must be approved by the Tulsa Health Department and kept on file at your establishment.

Look For Us On The Web !

Our website www.tulsa-health.org is expanding. Soon consumers and restaurant operators will be able to find educational information about inspections as well as findings on recent inspections. We have many resources available now:

- Food handler Study Guides in English, Spanish and Chinese
- Daily self-inspection sheets and food temperature monitoring forms
- Food Safety posters for download or print
- Foodhandler class schedule of dates and times
- Manager Certification information

Keep checking the website.

Personal Hygiene Quiz – Answer Key

1. **False** – One of the most effective ways to protect ourselves and others from illness is through good personal hygiene. Bathing daily and changing clothes worn in close contact with the body also helps to minimize offensive smells.
2. **True** – The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) estimates approximately 20% of foodborne illness outbreaks are caused from ill food employees working with food.
3. **True** – Uniforms are worn to protect the food from the risk of contamination. They should be clean and free of dust, pet hairs, loose fibers, or anything that can contaminate the customer's food.
4. **False** – Gloves are not a replacement for proper hand washing, and they should be changed as often as hand washing is required. Hands should always be washed before gloves are used.
5. **False** – Using a food thermometer is the only way to accurately determine whether the food is hot or cold enough.