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OPERATIONS

5 Things You Can Do Today to Improve Your Safe Food Handling

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Feel a wave of fear when your health inspector walks through the front door of your restaurant? It doesn't have to be that way, and this relationship doesn't have to be a cantankerous one. With a purpose, a plan, and a partnership, together you can work toward safe food handling to ensure customers have the cleanest, safest, and best dining experience possible.



“The most important things about food safety are that it's very intentional and it's not an accident,” says Paul Ho, director of Food Safety and Facilities at Chick-fil-A in Irvine, CA, “As an owner, you have to be very intentional about making sure it's a priority. If you don't care that it's a priority, it will not be a priority.”

Here are some major food handling issues that can show up during your annual health department inspections that you can start addressing today.

How to Start Improving Your Food Handling Today

If you don't know which staff members have up-to-date food handling certificates or what's necessary for a successful protection program, start with these resources:

- [Food Codes by State](#) (Program Development, Certifications)
- [HACCP \(Hazard Analysis Critical Control Point\)](#) (Training, Certification)
- [ServSafe](#) (Training, Certification)
- [Food Handlers Card and Licenses](#) (Certification)
- [Learn2Serve](#) (Certification)
- [Food Handler Manager Certification](#) (ANSI accredited, Training, Certification)
- [ANSI Certification](#) (Training, Certification)
- [ANSI Food Handler Training Certificate Program](#) (Program Development, Training, Certification)
- [FSMA Training](#) (Program Development, Training, Certification)
- [SNHD Card](#) (Certification)

Follow the Fed

“The biggest thing in this industry specifically, whether it's in a classroom or it's online...is to understand what's your capacity in terms of the financial resources you have to be in compliance? No matter what, the minimum is to be in compliance,” explains Homie Kabir, business manager for food and beverage training at 360 Training. And that minimum compliance means following guidelines issued by the CDC, FDA, USDA, and other federal organizations that dictate what restaurants should and shouldn't be doing for safe food handling. Look up [your state's food codes](#), created by the FDA, to see rules and regulations for your area.

- [Food Safety Practices of Restaurant Workers](#)
- [Food Safety Certification and Knowledge](#)

Risk Factor

Ho's top advice for improving your food safety today is to start with high risk items and research what processes are best for handling those items. Then, create curriculum and a standard operating procedure (SOP) to ensure staff are handling those items correctly. "A lot of people don't know that produce is often what causes food safety emergencies; it's often not the meat," says Ho, "For us, it's making sure that we know what the temperature ranges are for food. What are proper cool down procedures? How can we make it so that our fridges are not overworking themselves?"

- [Practices Linked to Foodborne Illness Outbreaks](#)

Set Records Straight

Are your food handler license records easy to locate, read, and determine who is or isn't in compliance? Can you easily tell who's completed safe food handling courses? Ho says keeping good records of training helps encourage proper food handling, and having someone in charge of the records can assist in compliance happening daily.

Having an HR management platform that tracks out-of-date trainings and food handler cards is a must, says Kabir, if you don't want them to slip by. Utilize automated alerts to easily remind yourself and employees about expiring food handler certificates, licenses, or cards.

Temperature Check

Ho says when he's dined out, he's noticed other establishments' lack of temperature awareness of safe food handling. "There's a four-hour [window] in which you can have food in a certain range...If you did a random poll and asked people, 'How long has your produce or your food been outside of the refrigerator or sitting there?' they wouldn't have an idea off the top of their head," he says.

- [Best Food Cooling Practices for Restaurants](#)
- [Factors Affecting Safe Food Preparation by Food Workers and Managers](#)

Scrub Up

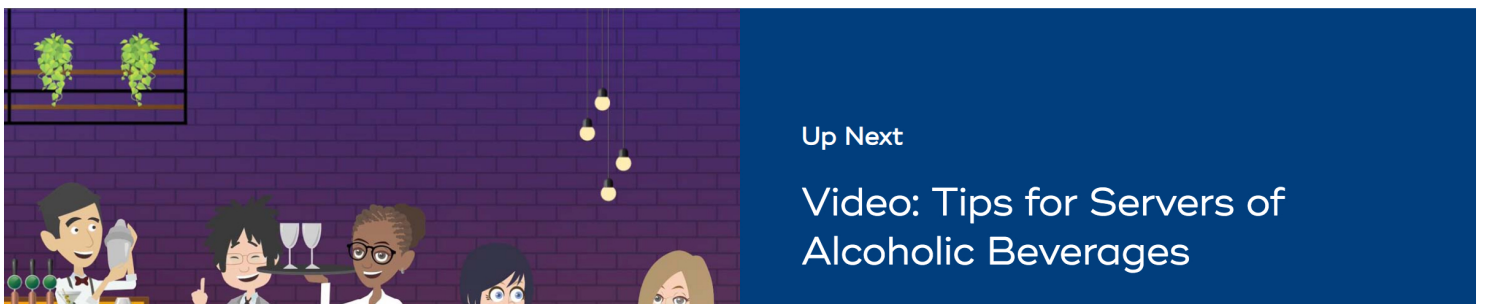
Your employees should be washing their hands all the time. Period. Kabir says whether it's restroom trips, separating dirty and clean dishes, making sure the meat and produce prep areas are clean and separated, or organizing to prevent cross-contamination, handwashing should be constant.

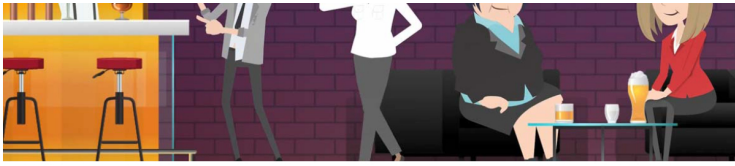
- [Food Workers Handwashing and Food Preparation](#)

Use Today to Design a Food Handling Program That Sticks

"Don't try to cut corners; unfortunately, a lot of restaurants do that. Do things the right way, and your customers will respond in kind," says Kabir, "If you have bad reviews because you didn't have the right SOPs in place or you didn't properly cook your food or prepare your food or store your food, that'll be reflected. There's a correlation between your reviews and the way you prepare your food."

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