



Food Safety News

Listeria — What you should know!

By John J. Weidner

In recent news reports you may have read or heard about the recall of Rocky Ford cantaloupe from Jensen Farms of Colorado for possible *Listeria* contamination. As of October 17, 2011 a total of 123 persons were infected with any of the four outbreak-associated strains of *Listeria monocytogenes* from 26 states including three reported cases in Indiana. As of this writing, twenty-five deaths have been reported, including one in Indiana. Here is some helpful information about Listeria.



Listeria monocytogenes enlarged several thousand times.

What is *Listeria* and where is it found?

Listeria is a bacterium most commonly found in domestic and wild mammals, fowl and people. The organism is also found in soil, water, mud and silage (plants stored in a silo).

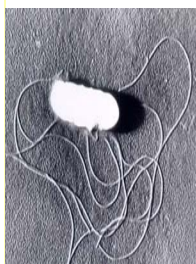
Listeriosis Facts

Listeriosis is caused by the rod shaped bacterium *Listeria monocytogenes*.

Listeria can infect anyone. When infected the disease is known as *Listeriosis*. *Listeriosis* can only be positively diagnosed by culturing the organism from blood, cerebrospinal fluid, or stool (although the latter is difficult and of limited value). Those at highest risk include pregnant women, fetuses, children, the elderly, and immunocompromised including alcoholic, cirrhotic or diabetic adults. Symptoms include fever, intense headache, nausea, and vomiting.

Mode of transmission involves the ingestion of raw or contaminated milk, soft cheeses, produce, and ready to eat meats. The incubation period is highly variable, ranging from 3 to 70 days following a single exposure to an implicated product. Median incubation period is 15 days.

How to Protect Yourself, Your Family, & Your Customers



Listeria monocytogenes. Scanning EM showing Flagella .

The most important preventative measures are to thoroughly rinse your produce under running water and to thoroughly cook, or reheat, food to proper temperatures. Store raw meat, fish and poultry below food that will not be cooked. The Indiana Retail Food Establishment Sanitation Requirements, Title 410 IAC 7-24, 'the code', requires cooking certain foods to safe minimum internal temperatures: poultry 165°F for 15 seconds; stuffed meat, meat, fish or pasta to 165°F; ground meat and meat mixtures to 155°F for 15 seconds; and pork (cutlets) and beef steaks 145°F for 15 seconds. Refer to the food code book for further cooking time and temperature requirements. The CDC recommends to refrigerate or freeze within two hours or within one hour in hot weather (above 90°F). Do not leave meat, fish, poultry, or cooked food sitting out.

Additionally, pregnant women and immunocompromised people should avoid ready-to-eat foods, smoked fish, and any food product made with unpasteurized milk including soft cheeses.

Use soap and warm water to wash hands for at least 20 seconds. Use clean dinnerware. Frequently wash countertops with hot soapy water and clean up spills immediately.

Did you know?
According to the CDC there are about 1,600 cases of Listeriosis annually in the United States.

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This year the National Restaurant Association's theme for National Food Safety Education month in September is "Lessons Learned from the Health Inspections". Read more about it on page three and at www.serfsafe.com/nfsem



Do You Have _____?

By Matthew Bottoms

There are several important documents every retail food establishment must have, and during the course of a routine inspection by the health department, you will be asked if you have them. The first document is Indiana's Retail Food Establishment Sanitation Requirements, Title 410 IAC 7-24, aka 'the state food code or rule'. This rule is the statewide regulation for operating a food establishment. The current version has been in effect since November 13, 2004. One of the first requirements in the rule is that every food establishment must have a copy on hand.



Secondly, every establishment must have a copy of the 'Elkhart County Food Service Ordinance' number 2005-322. The county ordinance spells out specific licensing requirements that are not covered by the state rule and it provides the procedures for applying and enforcing the state rule. This version of the ordinance has been in effect since July 1, 2005. When this ordinance was revised, the requirement for each establishment to have a copy was added, following the example of the state rule, to increase awareness and knowledge of the ordinance.

Thirdly, every establishment must have its food service license, issued by the health department, posted in a conspicuous place where it can be seen by the public. In the case of mobile establishments, the stickers issued by the health department must be posted on the outside of the unit. These requirements are specified in the county ordinance.

The last set of documents required in certain establishments is the certified food handler rule. If your establishment is the type of operation that requires certification according to Certification of Food Handler Requirements, Title 410 IAC 7-22, then you must have a copy of the person's certificate on file, as well as a copy of the rule. The most current version of this rule has been in effect since December 17, 2006.

Copies of these rules are available at the Environmental Health Services office in the Elkhart County Public Services Building located at 4230 Elkhart Road in Goshen. There are also links to them on our web page www.elkhartcountyhealth.org. Click on the Environmental Health Services section and then on the Food Service Sanitation option in the list of programs on the left side of the page. Because the state food rule is a lengthy document there is a copy charge of 15¢ per page to obtain it from our office. Currently the price is \$19.20. Electronic access is also permissible.



Stop the Spread of Hitchhiking Bacteria!

By Jordan Reyes

In a food service facility, the proper storage and handling of food is essential to prevent cross contamination. You may not realize it, but the positions in which refrigerated raw foods are stored in relation to other foods is critical. In general, the higher the required minimum internal cooking temperature, the lower the product should be on a shelf. Starting at the top, raw shelled eggs and seafood have a minimum cooking temperature of 145°F. Stored below this shelf are comminuted or ground raw meats, for example hamburger, with a minimum cooking temperature of 155°F. Below the ground raw meats is poultry, game animals, and stuffed meat, fish, and pasta products with a minimum cooking temperature of 165°F. If raw chicken (requiring a cooking temperature of 165°F), for example, were to be stored above raw pork (requiring a cooking temperature of 145°F), the excess raw chicken liquid may leak on to the raw pork and the bacteria from the excess liquid of the chicken may not be killed in the cooking process of the pork.

In the cases of ready to eat foods, separating washed produce (fruits and vegetables) from unwashed produce is just as important.

Produce always needs to be thoroughly washed with potable water as it may contain soil and other contaminants. It is, therefore, necessary that washed vegetables be stored above or away from unwashed vegetables so the soil and other contaminants from the unwashed produce do not contaminate washed produce or other ready to eat foods. In general, washed vegetables need to be stored at the top, followed by unwashed vegetables, then the raw meats (in the order as stated above) on the bottom shelf. By properly storing foods, you avoid any issues of cross contamination and decrease the chances of a foodborne illness.

Another way to prevent cross contamination is by designating certain cutting boards and utensils for the different types of raw foods. By separating the cutting boards and utensils, you are avoiding any leftover raw material from transferring to another raw meat or ready to eat foods. Ideally, DO NOT use the same cutting board and knife used to cut raw chicken and then cut tomatoes used in a salad. If you must use the same cutting board and knife do not use them unless they are thoroughly washed, rinsed, and sanitized between food items. Instead use separate cutting boards and knives for each task and don't forget about hand washing!

Getting the Most Out of a Restaurant Inspection

by Ashley Curtis

Health inspections are a regular part of life in any food service business. It is important to remember that health inspectors are there to protect public health and protect you as a restaurant owner from potential liabilities. Look at health inspections as a way for you to minimize risk to yourself and your customers and to make sure that safe food handling practices are utilized. Here are some tips regarding how to learn from a restaurant inspection and how to make the inspection run smoothly:

- Once the health inspector introduces themselves and shows you valid credentials, let the inspector enter the back of your operation. Do not make the inspector wait while you quickly try to correct violations. This action might actually result in more violations being noted.
- Remain calm and communicative. The health inspectors also learn a lot of new ideas and information about new equipment while talking with operators.
- Feel free to ask questions as they arise.
- Fix critical violations as the inspector requests.
- Answer the inspector's questions honestly and the best you can. During an inspection, the health official will often ask employees questions about the task they are currently performing. Asking workers task oriented and safety questions will keep the knowledge fresh in their minds and help gauge if your training techniques are effective.
- Be prepared to demonstrate and tell the inspector how you perform certain tasks in the operation.
- Have relevant records on hand. These records typically include receipts from pest control treatments, water testing reports if the facility is on well water, septic or grease trap pumping receipts, a Certified Food Handler certificate, food temperature logs, HACCP plans, employee health policies, the Elkhart County Food Service Ordinance 2005-322, and the Retail Food Establishment Sanitation Requirements Title 410 IAC 7-24. Taking time to check over and locate these records yourself before an inspection makes it much easier for you to provide these documents when the inspector arrives.



Have a staff meeting after the inspection. Go over the inspection findings with employees. Point out both positive and negative habits. Spend some time explaining proper practices, so your employees understand why a certain action is required. The health inspector has many training materials available to you upon your request.

In the meantime before your next inspection, it's a good idea to conduct your own examination of food safety practices and identify trouble areas that need improvement. Though it may be tempting to put off certain repairs or overlook a few minor health violations, the better practice is to treat every day as the day an inspector will arrive.

If you make food safety a priority in your food establishment, then the restaurant inspection process shouldn't be anything to worry about. A health inspector can be a great resource for helping you improve your food safety practices and you should take advantage of his or her expertise to make your operation better by providing another level of quality control.



That's a Potentially Hazardous Food?

By Amber Yike

A potentially hazardous food is defined in the Indiana Retail Food Establishment Sanitation Requirements 410 IAC 7-24 as "a food that is natural or synthetic and requires temperature control because it is in a form capable of supporting the growth of infectious or toxigenic microorganisms". Dairy products and meats may be the first potentially hazardous foods that come to mind, but there is another product that many don't realize is potentially hazardous.

Melons are a favorite among many summertime treats. The fruit grows from a vine that is close to or on the ground where toxigenic microorganisms, such as *Salmonella* or *Listeria*, could be a potential contaminant. Once a melon is cut, it becomes a potentially hazardous food that requires temperature control. The reason for this is that potential contamination on the hard to clean exterior of the melon can be transferred to the fleshy, edible portion of the melon upon cutting. The edible portion of melon is very moist, which provides a perfect surface for bacteria rapidly grow. Thoroughly washing a melon before cutting it can significantly reduce the amount of bacteria on the surface, but it is no guarantee that all of the bacteria will be washed away. Once a melon is cut, it needs to be held at 41°F or below to keep the growth and spread of bacteria to a minimum. Without this temperature control, the edible portion of the melon becomes a perfect environment for bacteria to grow and multiply.

To enjoy this favorite summertime fruit safely, wash the surface thoroughly *and* pre-chill prior to cutting. Hold cut melon at 41°F or below.

To bleach or not to bleach, that is the question.

By Donny Aleo

Proper sanitizing plays a vital role in the maintenance of a quality food service facility. What is the difference between cleaning and sanitizing? What are my options for sanitizing? How do I know if I have the right concentration of chemical sanitizer? How do I know what kind of chlorine bleach to use?

Cleaning removes food and soil from a surface, whereas sanitizing reduces pathogens (the things that can make you sick) on the surface to acceptably safe levels.

Chemical sanitizing offers a few options. The two most common types of sanitizer used in a food service facility are chlorine (bleach) and quaternary ammonia (quat). Both are quite effective and both have their advantages and disadvantages. Regardless of which is used at your food service facility, it is important to know the correct concentration for your sanitizing solution. Sanitizer solution is water (no soap) combined with sanitizer. The best rule of thumb or advice that can be given is to **FOLLOW THE MANUFACTURER'S DIRECTIONS** when preparing your solution and have the proper chemical test kit(s) to verify the concentration of the sanitizer solution.



Know your chemical!

If you are using quaternary ammonia you need to confirm the concentration of your solution with quat test strips. This paper is orange in color and should register a change in color per the manufacturer's directions. Color change from orange to a dark green or blue is typically too high (typically you want 200 ppm). Contrary to pH test strips, which change color instantly, quat test strips typically take 10 seconds of immersion in the solution for appropriate use. If you are using chlorine (bleach) then you need to confirm the concentration of your solution using chlorine test paper/strips. This paper is white and registers a color change per the manufacturer's directions. Color change to black typically means the concentration is too high (typically you want 50-100 ppm). For either chemical if there is no color change the sanitizer level is too low to be effective and if too high it may leave a toxic residue on utensils and possibly contaminate your food. When choosing a chlorine bleach sanitizer be certain that it is labeled for use in a retail food establishment, and that it is unscented. Remember, "The label is the law." Always follow the manufacturer's directions for sanitizing.



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