

Minnesota Department of Health Partnership and Workforce Development Unit  
University of Minnesota Extension Food Safety Education Team  
*Cooking Safely for a Crowd Workshop* - October 18, 2011

## Participant Questions and Answers

### Topics: Menus, Recipes, Planning, Shopping and Transporting Food

#### *What are some sources for quantity recipes?*

We recommend the following:

- Quantity Recipes Series, University of Missouri-Columbia. Search and order online.
- Food for Fifty, Mary Molt, Ph.D., R.D., Kansas State University
- USDA Recipes for Schools,  
<http://www.nfsmi.org/Templates/TemplateDefault.aspx?q=cEIEPTewMiZpc01ncj10cnVI>

#### *Soup Kitchens and other feeding programs in churches get food from Second Harvest etc., and the food may be past the "use by" date. Can that food be used? If so, how should it be handled?*

"Use-by" dates usually refer to best quality and are not safety dates. Even after the date expires, a product should be safe, if it has been handled properly, and if it has been kept at 40° F or below, if it is a refrigerated item.

- A "Sell-By" date tells the store how long to display the product for sale. You should buy the product before the date expires.
- A "Best if Used By (or Before)" date is recommended for best flavor or quality. It is not a purchase or safety date.
- A "Use-By" date is the last date recommended for the use of the product while at peak quality. The date has been determined by the manufacturer of the product.

#### *What types of homemade pie can we serve?*

It would be best if the pies were made at the site, or purchased, rather than baked at individual homes. Baked fruit pies overall are the best choice. Any pies could be served if safely prepared, baked, cooked, and refrigerated as needed. Avoid pies that call for raw eggs/yolks like some French Silk recipes. (If raw egg recipes must be used, cooks should use pasteurized eggs.) Cream and custard pies must be refrigerated and may not be sold at bake sales.

## Topics: Personal and Kitchen Hygiene, and Cross Contamination

### ***Why should we not use anti-bacterial soap?***

Antibacterial soap is **no more effective** at killing germs in the home or public places than regular soap. Using antibacterial soap may contribute to the development of antibiotic resistant germs.

So, we do not recommend using antibacterial soap unless you are caring for someone very ill, and it is recommended by your healthcare provider. Antibacterial soap must be left on your hands for about 2 minutes in order to have any effect on bacteria

### ***Does it matter whether we use liquid or bar soap?***

Liquid soap is generally recommended over bar soap for cleaning your hands. Liquid soap is easy to use and will not spread germs from one person to another. Germs can grow on bar soap and easily spread from one person to another. However, bar soap can be used at home, if no one has skin infections.

### ***When my husband was in the hospital, hospital staff used hand sanitizer whenever they entered his room. The labels say sanitizer removes 99 % percent of bacteria. Why isn't sanitizer best in the kitchen?***

Hand sanitizer is for use on **clean hands**. Hospital staff use sanitizers on their clean hands in-between ordinary tasks such as touching paper or door knobs or clean linens. Hospital staff must wash hands with soap and water if they come into contact with skin, bodily fluids, or contaminated equipment.

Hand sanitizers are not effective when hands are contaminated with organic matter, including blood, feces, mucous, fats and oils, or dirt. To use sanitizers correctly, you must cover every bit of skin and nails with the sanitizer, and rub hands together until sanitizer is completely dry.

Although sanitizers are effective against many germs, they have not proven to be effective against Norovirus, by far the most common cause of foodborne illness.

### ***Is dipping your hands in a Clorox/water solution a better alternative than the 20 second soap and running water scrub? Why or why not? Why does this scrub not include using a fingernail brush?***

Whether you wish to eradicate bacteria from counter-tops or hands, cleaning and sanitizing are two different steps. First, we scrub (friction is the key to scrubbing) these things with soap and water, and then we sanitize to remove additional bacteria. Hands or counter-tops, there is no substitute for soap, water and friction. A nail brush – friction aimed at those hard to reach places like under nails - is a wonderful addition to any handwashing, and is recommended for food workers. Also, a bleach solution can damage the skin. Damaged skin is more susceptible to infection which then could cause food contamination.

***When exactly should gloves be used in the kitchen? (We are a vegetarian facility, typically cut up veggies, fruits, butter breads, etc.)***

Gloves should be used - over clean hands - whenever you are handling ready-to-eat foods such as bread, rolls, sandwiches, salads, or the foods used to prepare them. It is important to change them periodically even when doing one task, and to change each time you move from one task to another. The main purpose of gloves is not to prevent cross contamination of meats and veggies but to keep personal germs (fecal matter) out of the food.

***What is the guide for the use of latex gloves? From the conference I came away with the impression gloves are just an “extra.” If you scrub your hands the gloves are not necessary unless you have an abrasion of some type.***

We are sorry if we created that impression. Gloves are a must if you have a wound or infection on your hands. However, they should also be used any time that you are handling ready-to-eat foods such as bread, rolls, sandwiches, salads, or the foods used to prepare them. If you do not use gloves, ready-to-eat foods must be handled with tongs, utensils or waxed paper - any clean barrier between hands and food. Washing hands is one step in preventing bacteria from coming in contact with food; the gloves provide one more important barrier.

***Is having a separate sink in the kitchen for hand washing a must? Is a near-by restroom acceptable, as we don't have a location to install a different sink?***

Any licensed facility must have a separate handwashing sink. In an unlicensed kitchen, a separate handwashing sink is strongly recommended because handsinks are highly contaminated with bacteria and other germs and are a potential source of contamination (**best option**). If you have two sinks – one used for food preparation and one for dishwashing, the dishwashing sink could be used for handwashing, if it is stocked with hand soap and clean towels (**second option**). Restaurant employees who go to the bathroom are required to wash their hands a second time when they return to the kitchen because their hands could become contaminated as they move between the bathroom and kitchen. If the nearby bathroom is your only choice, make sure to train staff to shut off the water and to open the bathroom door using a paper towel. **This is the least desirable option.**

***A photo in the newspaper shows workers in paper hats. Nothing was mentioned in the video conference regarding hair nets/hats. I would like to know what the ruling is on this.***

Food workers and dishwashers in a licensed facility are required to use some type of hair restraint. That could be a cap, hairnet, bandana, hair-tie or beard cover (snood). It is certainly more hygienic (and appealing) to keep hair out of the food whether or not you are a licensed kitchen. Wearing hair restraints also reduces the frequency of people touching their hair and transferring bacteria from their hair to the food.

***What is your opinion about chewing gum, especially snapping?***

Food workers should never eat while working but there is no mention in the Food Code of gum chewing. Some gum chewers may touch the gum with their hands as they are chewing it, such as twisting it around their finger. This results in hands becoming contaminated which may then contaminate food, equipment and any surfaces that are touched. If this practice was observed in a licensed kitchen, the failure to wash hands after touching something contaminated would be cited.

***We have heavy plastic cutting boards, if you do not have a dishwasher how should they be cleaned?***

The cutting boards should be scrubbed with hot soap and water, rinsed with clean water, sanitized with a chlorine solution, and allowed to air dry.

***We have large Rubbermaid tubs that we store meatballs in for our dinner. They are cleaned by rinsing them with Clorox-would that be the correct procedure?***

First, food container must be food grade. The Rubbermaid tubs you are using may or may not be the right products for food contact and storage. (Most large Rubbermaid containers are meant for storage of non-food household items and may not be made of food safe materials.) Many household storage containers and/or containers that once held non-food items (e.g., cleaning products) would not be safe and should not be used.

Second, cleaning and sanitizing are two separate and different, important steps. First scrub with soap and hot water, rinse, and then sanitize using a chlorine solution.

***When cups and glasses come out of the dishwasher, if there is time can we let the rack sit on a bath towel and dry off, wiping off the excess on the bottom of the cups, which sit upside down. They will air dry, but sometimes there isn't enough time to wait for that. Should we be wiping the outsides and stacking them upside down on the cup racks to finish drying, or dry them more with a towel?***

In a licensed kitchen, dishes must be air-dried or machine-dried. The temperature for the sanitizing rinse should be 180 degrees F. (Each dish machine should have a data plate giving proper temperatures for washing and sanitizing.)

Towels of any kind should not be used. If you are not licensed, you do not have to abide by this regulation but we strongly recommend air-drying (**best option**). If you must dry dishes, it is very important that you provide an adequate supply of clean, dry dish towels that are not used for any other purpose. Never stack damp dishes!

***Silverware – should they be washed twice? Once flat and spread out and then in the silverware cups, handles up? Or, just put them in the cups only, one time?***

We recommend rinsing to remove food, and one wash, following by a sanitizing step and machine or air-drying. If these steps are followed, remaining food may not be attractive but it will be safe from pathogens.

***Our very small church does not have a dishwasher. Is this something we need to worry about at this point? Are the laws changing about this end of sanitation? Do you recommend any specific dishwashing and drying precautions?***

The three compartment sink is required in a licensed kitchen and strongly recommended in any kitchen outside of the home. Dish machines are not required equipment. The three compartment sink can be used to safely wash, rinse and sanitize dishes and equipment. (Also see above)

## **Topics: Preparing, Serving, Thawing, Cooling, and Storing Food**

***I was a little shocked to hear that thawing meat on the counter is not OK, since I've always done it that way. Can you repeat the thawing advice?***

There are 3 ways to safely thaw frozen foods. Thawing on the kitchen counter at room temperature is not acceptable because the outer portions of the meat will be in the temperature danger zone and can grow bacteria long before the center of the meat is thawed.

- **Best:** In the refrigerator
- **Acceptable:** Sealed (e.g., in a tight container, sealed plastic bag, or original watertight packaging) and submerged in cold water or in cold, running water. Water must be changed every 30 minutes.
- **Acceptable:** In the microwave. Plan to cook immediately after thawing.

***How can Listeria be eliminated from cantaloupe? (It doesn't seem that scrubbing with a brush would be effective)***

In the recent outbreak involving massive contamination of cantaloupe with Listeria bacteria, it is not clear whether scrubbing the fruit would have been enough to remove the bacteria. It is not known whether people were infected by bacteria on the rind, whether bacteria somehow migrated into the flesh of the fruit, or whether people spread contamination through the fruit by slicing it with a knife.

Nevertheless, scrubbing cantaloupe with a brush under running water and drying the fruit with a clean paper towel will in most cases remove or greatly reduce surface contamination, and this is always a good practice to follow. Once any melon is cut it is considered a potentially hazardous food and must be refrigerated and used within 7 days (the intent of the 7 days is to prevent listeria).

***Please repeat the three ways of cooling food. I missed something about ice.***

There are even more than three ways! The important thing is to cool food from 140 degrees to seventy within two hours and then to 41 degrees or less within an additional four hours.

- Cool by cutting large food items (e.g., a whole turkey) in smaller portions before refrigerating or freezing
- Cool by transferring foods from a large, deep container to smaller shallow containers no more than 2 inches deep (e.g., soup or stew).
- Cool foods like soup or spaghetti sauce by adding some of the liquid at the end of the process in the form of ice or cold broth.
- Cool by placing the container of food in an ice bath and stirring the food frequently. The ice must be replenished as it melts.
- Cool using a commercial ice wand.

***I was confused by something that was said during the workshop about covering or not covering food in the refrigerator. Will you please clarify?***

Food should be carefully packaged and completely sealed in containers or sealed plastic bags for refrigeration. This prevents cross-contamination, helps to delay spoilage, and will protect food from taking on the taste or odor of other foods in the refrigerator.

However, when cooling hot foods, it is permissible to leave containers uncovered to speed the cooling process. Cover the containers or repackage the foods after they have cooled to safe levels.

***I have understood from MDH Inspectors that crock pots are not appropriate in public settings. Are they OK if the temperature is kept at a safe level? Or are they not to be used at all? What about crock pot cooking? Is keeping food warm and serving from it ok and safe?***

Home-use crockpots and roasters are not allowed in licensed kitchens because they are not NSF approved. That doesn't only mean that they are not sturdy enough for constant use in a restaurant. With many of these products, the heating system is unreliable. If you use your crockpot or roaster, the only safe way to use it is with a thermometer to make sure the food is maintained at safe temperatures.

More crockpot/roaster advice:

- Heating or re-heating slowly in a crockpot at low temperatures can leave food in the danger zone for too long and lead to unsafe food. It's best to have food at the highest setting for an hour before turning on low, or heating on a stove to 165 degrees prior to placing in a crockpot.
- Consider boiling your stock, broth or water before you put it in the crock pot. It will help all the ingredients come to temperature sooner.

- Crockpots and roasters are often used unsafely to transport and store foods for too long at room temperature.
- Never put frozen or partially thawed meat or poultry into the roaster or crock pot.

***About serving family style as part of a fundraiser at a church: When bowls come back with food left in the bowls what can we do with the food? Does the food need to be discarded or can it be reheated to 165 degrees and used?***

Yes, the food needs to be discarded as it could have been contaminated by the people at the table. Bowls that are used for family style dinners should not be refilled for “seconds”.

***What about food that gets sold in cottage cheese, sour cream, etc. containers after a church dinner?***

Be very careful to use food grade containers that you have properly washed, rinsed and sanitized. Note that cottage cheese and similar containers are designed for one-time use and should not be used to heat foods. Remember that food should be kept cold (<40 F) or hot (>140 F) and cooled properly. It is hard to monitor whether these foods are safely handled after they leave the dinner.

## **Topic: Regulatory Matters**

### **▪ Training and Certification Questions**

***I am ServSafe certified. Can I be the “trained volunteer?”***

Yes. If you are ServSafe certified or hold a Certified Food Manager (CFM) certificate, you may act as the trained food safety volunteer and train other volunteer cooks who prepare and serve food for organization events.

***Do we need a certificate that we attended training? And if we haven’t been trained yet, is a food inspector going to come knocking at our door & shut us down?***

You do not need a certificate. Your volunteers can watch the archived workshop online at: <mms://stream2.video.state.mn.us/MDHVC/cookingsafelyforacrowd101811.wmv> or purchase a DVD for \$3.00 by contacting Maggie Edwards at MDH ([margaret.edwards@state.mn.us](mailto:margaret.edwards@state.mn.us) or 651-201-4506).

We suggest that you distribute the Kitchen Companion ([http://www.fsis.usda.gov/PDF/Kitchen\\_Companion.pdf](http://www.fsis.usda.gov/PDF/Kitchen_Companion.pdf)) before viewing the video, and follow the video with a “book club” sort of discussion with your group. We recommend that the organization keep a record of dates and attendance, and that the training is refreshed every three years.

▪ **Questions about Licensing and the New Exemptions**

***How do you define “fellowship” as in “weddings, fellowship meals, or funerals conducted by a faith-based organization...” and how do you define “fundraiser?”***

There are no definitions of “fundraiser” or “fellowship meal” in the language of the law. Nor does it make a distinction between events where there is a fee or a free will donation. Therefore, the definition/identification of the event is up to the organization holding the event. A “wedding, funeral or fellowship meal” held by a faith-based organization is an event defined by the organization as a wedding, funeral or fellowship meal. Whether or not training is required, we strongly encourage organizations to have volunteers trained in food safety.

***Are the documents with the flow charts that explain the new exemptions available on-line?***

Yes.

- Exemptions for Faith-Based Organizations - <http://www.health.state.mn.us/foodsafety/away/groupsfaithex.pdf>
- Exemptions for: School Concession Stands; Fraternal, Sportsman and Patriotic Organizations; and Post Disaster Food Service Events: <http://www.health.state.mn.us/foodsafety/away/groupsotherex.pdf>

***We are a church with approx. 300 members. We serve deserts following services every Sunday, meals during Confirmation Classes and sometimes Bible Studies where only members are in attendance. Do THESE events fall under the "exemption" section of this new law?***

These sound like fellowship meals, s would fall under the exemption.

***We do also, however, serve meals for community events as well. Example: Hog Roast, Thanksgiving Dinner. Are these circumstances where one who is certified would be required to be present?***

These types of meals would require a trained volunteer to have trained the other volunteers in food safety, or you could have all the volunteers watch the video.

***It is my understanding that service organizations like the Lions will not be able to sponsor meals that are fund raisers unless they are held in a "faith-based organization" building or a temporary license will be needed. Is this correct and what is needed to obtain a temporary license?***

There is a separate exemption that deals with fraternal, sportsmen’s or patriotic organizations. You can find more info here: <http://www.health.state.mn.us/foodsafety/away/groupsotherex.pdf>

***Is a food license required if alcohol is served?***

Many city/county liquor licenses do require a food license if alcohol will be served. Please contact your local liquor licensing agency for more details.

▪ **Liability Questions**

***What are your thoughts on liability issues the faith-based organization faces without licensing if illness occurs?***

As we have seen with outbreaks at *licensed* food establishments, the issue of licensing does not seem to be a factor when it comes to liability. If a faith-based organization is involved in an outbreak, there is a chance the organization may be sued.

***What are your ideas about liability and food safety training, if limited training happens?***

We encourage any person involved in food preparation to receive food safety training. We cannot guarantee that any amount of training will protect an organization from litigation. The best course any organization can take is to prevent food poisoning and foodborne outbreaks. Many training resources are available, as listed on the Resource Sheet on this website.

▪ **Questions about Types of Events and Types of Food Served**

***We have congregation members that bring in food for events like funerals that need cooking (e.g., lasagna). Is this permissible?***

In most cities and counties in Minnesota this is permissible. We would prefer that foods were prepared in the kitchen where they will be served. If you do allow foods from home, make sure that they are transported and stored safely.

***Do bake sales (of home-baked foods) fall under the "pot-luck" exemption?***

In general, bake sales fall under the (following) Department of Agriculture exclusion for community events or farmers' markets:

*Subd. 9. Community event or farmers' market.*

*An individual who prepares and sells food that is not potentially hazardous food, as defined in rules adopted under section 31.11, at a community event or farmers' market with gross receipts of \$5,000 or less in a calendar year from the prepared food items. If the food is not prepared in a kitchen that is licensed or inspected, the seller must post a visible sign or placard stating that: "These products are homemade and not subject to state inspection." Prepared foods sold under this subdivision must be labeled to accurately reflect the name and address of the person preparing and selling the foods.*

Therefore, if the bake sale is at a "community event", you post a sign, and you make less than \$5,000/year, then it is excluded from licensure and regulation

***Do we need to let people know that the food sold at a fundraiser is not cooked in a commercial kitchen?***

The law does not specify that notification is necessary at a fundraising dinner. However, if non-potentially hazardous items are sold at a community event (i.e., a bake sale), then the Department of Agriculture exclusion requires notification to say: *“These products are homemade and not subject to state inspection.”*

***Can outside groups like a basketball tournament bring food into the church or a school building from home, e.g. sloppy Joe mix already made up and heated on site?***

If you're talking about a church setting, then outside food is fine. If you're talking about a school that has a license, then it is not OK. The Food Code says that the licensed kitchen must use food from an approved source - home prepared foods are not an approved source for a licensed kitchen.

***We have a fall supper every year and ask members to make fruit desserts (and we don't refrigerate them). Is this okay to continue to do this?***

Yes. Baked fruit pies are fine. Although please consider requiring members bring food to view the online training. And encourage them to properly store and transport the food items.

***Members bring cookies and/or bars made in our homes and serve them with coffee before and after church. Can we continue to do this?***

Yes.

**[www.health.state.mn.us](http://www.health.state.mn.us)**

For more information about the “Church Lady” bill and faith-based exemptions, contact Deborah Durkin at (651) 201-4509.

**If you require this document in another format,  
such as large print, Braille, or cassette tape, call:**

**(651) 201-5000 ♦ 1-800-657-3908 ♦ MDH TTY (651) 201-5797**