

Excellent sanitation is important in all kitchens, but especially when your guests consist of a high-risk population.

The following is in no way a complete course of action for running a sanitary operation, but merely a reminder of some of the most important things to always keep in mind.

Train your staff to:

- wash their hands in warm, soapy water very frequently throughout their work day. And always after using the rest room, sneezing, touching raw meats, or taking any kind of break. Help them by making sure that each hand sink always has plenty of sanitizing soap, hot water and paper towels available.
- keep all work surfaces clean and sanitized, and make it easy by insisting that each station has a fresh container of sanitizing solution with a clean towel at all times.
- always be aware of cross contamination and how to prevent it.

Communicate with your staff regularly about proper food-handling practices. Telling them once won't work. Frequent and consistent reinforcement is the key.

Keep your refrigerators at <40°F and your freezers at <32°F.

When cooling items like hot stocks, stews or soups, get them from hot to cool as quickly as possible. This is so that they are in the "danger zone" (40°F-140°F) for as little time as possible. Then store them, like all items that need refrigeration, in covered, marked and dated containers at <40°F.

If you're not sure about the soundness of any product, at any time, the old saying, "When in doubt, throw it out" is a good one to follow.

Teach your staff the minimum internal temperatures according to USDA standards for various items, and make sure that they always use them:

- Poultry: 165°F
- Casseroles: 165°F
- Ground Meats (except Poultry): 160°F
- Eggs: 160°F
- Fish and Shellfish: 145°F
- Beef, Pork, Veal and Lamb: 140°F

Write, and then use, daily and weekly cleaning schedules and checklists.

Insist on all kitchen staff working clean and organized, and keeping *all* storage areas (coolers, freezers, dry-storage...) spotless and orderly.

Keep all chemicals, adhesives and cleaning products in well-marked, sealed containers, in separate storage areas away from food storage and preparation areas. Keep Data Sheets for all such products, and have them readily available for all staff to refer to. Pesticides are best left to professionals.

Pests can be an issue. Cover garbage cans and have them emptied frequently. Keep your kitchen organized and clean, including storage areas. Keep any holes in walls or foundations sealed. A professional pest service may be necessary, preferably one with experience in commercial kitchens. Always keep an eye on their work to make sure that no contamination occurs.

Your RD and CDM can be your most effective partners in helping your staff do the right thing. Routine in-service presentations on various topics and periodic in-house sanitation audits, along with habitual observation and consistent reminders about best sanitation practices are your most effective means for running a safe, healthy operation.

See Health Department inspections as the opportunity that they are. We're all on the same side in terms of wanting the best for our residents. Keeping an open mind to the professional, outside advice that inspectors offer will go a long way towards helping your operation be the best that it can be.