

Food Safety Update

This publication will keep operators of food service establishments up to date on food safety, regulations and foodborne illness. Content is generated as a collaboration between Fraser Health and Vancouver Coastal Health.

FOODSAFE Program Updates

FOODSAFE Certificates now have an expiry date

Did you know that 95 percent of people who took "FOODSAFE Level 1" five years ago or earlier would NOT PASS the exam if they wrote it again today?

Based on this research FOODSAFE Level 1 certificates will now have a 5 year expiry date. If you have a FOODSAFE Level 1 certificate, you will need to eventually renew yours.

Here are some important dates to remember:

- If your certificate was issued before July 29, 2013, your certificate is still valid until July 29, 2018. So remember to renew your certificate before July 2018.
- If your certificate was issued on or after July 29, 2013, an expiry date will be printed on the certificate. So remember to renew your certificate before that expiry date.

Lost your FOODSAFE certificate?

Getting a replacement certificate is easy. Just contact any Environmental Health office in Vancouver Coastal Health or Fraser Health and ask for a replacement certificate.

Changes in Processing Fees

Our processing fees for new certificates and FOODSAFE Level 1 Instructor certificates have increased.

Service	Before July 29, 2013	Starting July 29, 2013
Issue new: FOODSAFE Level 1 certificate	5.00	10.00
Issue replacement: FOODSAFE Level 1 certificate	15.00	15.00
Issue FOODSAFE refresher course certificate	N/A	7.00
Process FOODSAFE Level 1 Instructor application	.00	50.00
Renew FOODSAFE Level 1 Instructor certificate	.00	10.00

Renewing your Certificate

You can renew your certificate in one of two ways:

- Sign up for the full FOODSAFE Level 1 course, or
- Complete the new online FOODSAFE Refresher Course on your computer.

The new online FOODSAFE Refresher Course:

- Is only available if you have successfully completed FOODSAFE Level 1 before
- Is only offered online and can be taken anywhere at anytime if you have a computer with internet access
- Takes about 2 to 3 hours to complete
- Costs \$35.00



There will be an exam at the end of the online FOODSAFE Refresher Course. Students must achieve 80 percent or higher in order to pass. Visit www.foodsafe.ca for more information. ■

Food Safety - It's the law

The requirements for Food Safety Plans and Sanitation Plans changed in 2013 and affects both restaurants and food processing facilities (such as butcher shops and food manufacturing facilities).

What has changed:

- Restaurant operators must now show how they are "maintaining and following" their Food Safety Plan and Sanitation Plan, and
- Food processors must now develop, maintain and follow a Food Safety Plan and a Sanitation Plan.

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Bug Spotlight: E. coli

What is E. coli?

Escherichia coli is often called E. coli and is a group of bacteria found in the intestines of humans and animals. Some types of E. coli such as *E. coli O157:H7* can make people sick. Illness has been linked to undercooked ground meat; unpasteurized milk; cheese and fruit juices; contaminated water; contact with farm animals and animals in petting zoos; and contact with a person infected with E. coli.

What are the symptoms?

Symptoms of E. coli infection usually start within 3 to 4 days but can range from 1 to 10 days. Symptoms are not always the same for everyone but can include severe stomach cramps, diarrhea (can be bloody), vomiting and a fever. A small number of people who become ill with *E. coli O157:H7* will develop serious complications such as hemolytic uremic syndrome (HUS) which can lead to kidney failure or death.

What do you need to do?

- Do not let raw meats touch or drip onto other foods.
- Always use pasteurized products such as milk, milk products and juices.
- Cook ground beef products to an internal temperature of 71°C (use a thermometer).
- Carefully wash and sanitize any utensils and surfaces that come in contact with raw meat products.
- Wash your hands before and after handling any food products.
- Never work as a food handler if you have a gastrointestinal illness. ■

Undercooked Hamburgers

Over the last few years, eating undercooked hamburgers has gained popularity as individuals claim they are more juicy and tender. Undercooked burgers are also known as rare or medium-rare burgers. Unfortunately, their consumption can have serious consequences.

The problem with eating an undercooked burger is that the consumer may get food poisoning. The biggest risk with eating undercooked ground beef is exposure to the bacteria *E. coli O157:H7* which can cause watery and/or bloody diarrhea and stomach cramps. In extreme cases kidney damage may occur or even death. Luckily E. coli is easy to destroy if ground beef is cooked to at least 71°C.

Beef may become contaminated at the processing plant or at the butcher. You should assume that all ground beef could be contaminated with E. coli bacteria.

When meat is ground, contamination from the outside surface of the meat gets mixed into the rest of the meat. So even if the surface of the meat patty is cooked to 71°C (killing surface bacteria), any E. coli bacteria in the middle of the burger can survive if the inside temperature does not reach 71°C.

Contact your local Environmental Health Officer to discuss the steps you can take to reduce the risk associated with serving hamburgers. ■



How to make sure burgers are safe to eat?

☺ Best way	Cooking all ground meat to an internal temperature of 71°C. Checking the temperature by using a probe thermometer.
☹ Not the best way	Cutting open a burger to see if the juices are running clear or if there is no pink in the centre. This is not the best way to check doneness as ground beef can change colour before it is fully cooked.

Bivalve Shellfish Safety

Bivalves are shellfish that have two shells which are hinged on one side; such as oysters and clams. Bivalves may become contaminated and cause illness as they naturally ingest microorganisms and toxins that are in ocean water.

Reduce the risk of making your customers ill by purchasing shellfish from an approved source, keeping refrigerated, and cooking properly.

Can I harvest shellfish at the beach and serve them in my restaurant?

No. All shellfish served in BC restaurants must be obtained from an approved source. Shellfish must be processed in a plant registered with the federal government.



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What is an “approved source” for bivalves?

Businesses licensed by the BC Ministry of Agriculture or the federal Department of Fisheries and Oceans are an approved source. Purchasing shellfish from a supplier who is established in the seafood business is one way to make sure bivalves are from an approved source.

How can I tell if bivalve shellfish are not from an approved source?

Shellfish may be:

- Poor quality (dirty, smell bad, be different sizes).
- Packaged in improper containers (un-shucked shellfish are usually in a plastic meshed sack; shucked shellfish are sold in labeled, sealed containers).

Another indicator is when the supplier cannot provide a shellfish tag or other documentation that describes where the product came from.

What is a “shellfish tag”?

A shellfish tag is a document that is fixed to the sack of shellfish at the time of harvest. The tag identifies the name of the harvester, the area, and the date of harvest. It is used to identify the source of the shellfish in the event there is a need to recall a contaminated product.

My supplier does not provide tags. How do I prove the bivalve shellfish are from an approved source?

Tags may not be available if the sack of shellfish is broken into smaller quantities. If you purchase seafood from a large distributor, the supplier should provide a receipt or invoice that refers to the original tag. If you buy shellfish from a grocery store keep the receipt as proof of purchase.

How long should I keep shellfish tags, receipts or invoices?

You must keep these documents for at least three months even if you have no more of the shellfish left. ■

NOTE: All restaurants must indicate on their menu that EATING raw shellfish increases the risk of foodborne illness. Cooking shellfish will destroy the disease causing pathogens and prevent illness.

Sanitizers in low temperature dishwashers

How to measure the concentration of sanitizer in a low temperature dishwasher

Ensure that the sanitizing cycle in your dishwasher is working properly. This is critically important to reduce any disease-causing microorganisms on dishes to safe levels.

Low temperature dishwashers use a chemical that is pumped into the rinse cycle. This chemical is called the “sanitizer” and must be present at a minimum concentration level to be effective. The most commonly used chemical sanitizers are chlorine (bleach) and iodine.

Measuring the concentration of sanitizer in a dishwasher is easy and should be done every day.

How to measure sanitizer concentration

Before you begin, you need to know the type of sanitizer that is used in the dishwasher and the minimum concentration your dishwasher should apply to the dishes for sanitizing.

You will also need “test strips” - these are strips of paper that change colour when dipped into a sanitizing solution. There are different types of test strips for different types of chemical sanitizers, so make sure you have the correct type. Check with your chemical supply company to make sure you have the right test strips.

- Run the dishwasher through one cycle. When the rinse cycle is complete, wipe the test strip across a wet plate. The test strip should change colour.



- Read the concentration by matching the colour on the test strip to the colour chart on the container of test strips.

Don't use the machine for sanitizing dishes if the test strip does not change colour or if the level of sanitizer is less than the minimum required. Here are some common reasons for no or low sanitizer in the rinse cycle:

- Sanitizer container is low or empty
- Dishwasher pump needs to be primed to remove an air gap in the feed line
- Lines feeding sanitizer into the machine are blocked, twisted or in the wrong container
- Sanitizer pump needs to be adjusted

For additional information on low temperature dishwashers contact your local Environmental Health Officer. ■

Norovirus

Help reduce the spread of Norovirus

Although norovirus illness can occur at any time throughout the year, we often see an increase in outbreaks during the winter. Norovirus (formerly known as Norwalk virus) is easily spread and passes from person to person, often as the virus becomes airborne and contaminates food surfaces or surfaces which may contact food (counters, plates, tables, etc.).

Norovirus can cause a sudden onset of nausea, cramping, chills, fever, usually with vomiting or diarrhea. Symptoms of illness usually start 24 to 48 hours after being infected with the virus and generally last between 24 to 36 hours. You may have heard about outbreaks occurring in long term care facilities, hospitals, daycares and schools. Outbreaks are less noticeable in the community but food and food contact surfaces contaminated with norovirus can spread the disease to your customers.

Norovirus can be challenging to prevent, because it can be introduced not only by ill food handlers, but also by members of the public who have the virus. Since it is difficult to control who walks into your restaurant it is important to protect the foods you serve. Like all viruses norovirus does not need to grow in food to cause illness – it merely needs to survive until ingested. This is why even foods considered to be a low risk in causing food poisoning have been identified as the cause in some outbreaks.

If norovirus strikes, it hits hard, and can be tough to eliminate. Follow these key steps to prevent norovirus from affecting your restaurant customers:

1. Wash your hands carefully after using the toilet and before handling food.
 - Rub hands together for about 30 seconds when washing hands.
2. When you are sick do not prepare food for others.
 - Avoid going to work until at least 48 hours after symptoms have stopped.
3. Clean and disinfect contaminated surfaces after a vomiting accident or diarrheal accident.
 - Disinfect using a bleach solution of at least 1,000 ppm. Mix 80 ml of bleach with 4 litres of water; apply the solution to cleaned surfaces and leave to air dry. Norovirus is more difficult to destroy than bacteria.
 - Handle soiled clothes or linens carefully and wash laundry in hot water and detergent.
4. Protect foods on display from customer contamination. ■



Food Safety - It's the Law - Continued from page 1

Maintaining and following your Food Safety and Sanitation Plans helps reduce the chance that your customers get food poisoning. They may also save you money by:

- Reducing operational costs (e.g. well maintained equipment will last longer and run more efficiently).
- Decreasing food waste (e.g. maintaining safe food temperatures to avoid spoilage or disposal; rapidly cooled food will have a longer shelf life).
- Increasing business (e.g. food safety plans promote consistency in preparation).

If you are not currently maintaining and following your Food Safety or Sanitation Plan, you can start by:

- Making sure you keep a copy of the plans in your restaurant.
- Reviewing the plans to make sure they are up-to-date. The plans should be practical and reflect your current food preparation, cleaning and sanitation procedures.
- Training your staff. Food handlers should know what the plans are, where they are and how to use them.

For more information on maintaining and following a Food Safety Plan or Sanitation Plan, please contact your Environmental Health Officer. ■

Feedback

Tell us what you think of our Food Safety Update and topics you would like to see in future issues. Contact liz.postnikoff@fraserhealth.ca or Claudia.Kurzac@vch.ca.

This update has been prepared and published as a collaboration between Health Protection departments in Fraser Health and Vancouver Coastal Health.

Editors: Steven Eng, Inderjeet Gill and Liz Postnikoff, Fraser Health; Claudia Kurzac, Vancouver Coastal Health

Layout: Patricia Buchanan, Fraser Health

Contributors: Health Protection staff from Fraser Health and Vancouver Coastal Health

Environmental Health Offices:

Vancouver Coastal Health
Fraser Health

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