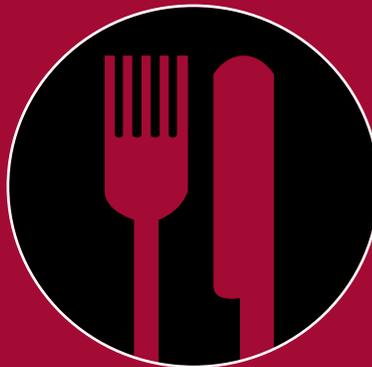




M A T T E R S



No. 13

NEW YORK CITY DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH AND MENTAL HYGIENE • WINTER 2010

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HEALTH DEPARTMENT PROPOSES LETTER GRADING FOR RESTAURANTS

The Health Department is proposing to give restaurants letter grades – A, B, or C – based on a restaurant’s inspection score, and to require the grade be posted near the restaurant entrance as of July 1, 2010. Frequency of inspections during the following months will be tied to the score received.

Any restaurant with a score that would result in a B or C grade would get a chance to improve its score on a second inspection before having to post its grade. The second inspection would be conducted no sooner than seven days after the initial inspection. If on that second inspection the restaurant’s score still resulted in

a grade of B or C, it would still not have to post its grade until it has had an opportunity to have the Notice of Violation issued at that inspection adjudicated at the Administrative Tribunal. The Department is accepting public comments on the grading proposal until February 5, 2010.

To read the proposal, please go to:
<http://www.nyc.gov/html/doh/downloads/pdf/notice/article-81-amend-1209.pdf>

Follow the directions on page 1 for pre-registering to speak and submitting comments by mail, fax, email, or online.

WOULD YOU LIKE TO SETTLE YOUR VIOLATIONS?

The DOHMH is now offering food service establishments the opportunity to settle their violations in lieu of having to wait at the Administrative Tribunal for their cases to be heard. Beginning on November 30, 2009, the DOHMH began making settlement offers to any interested establishment appearing at the Tribunal on the date of its scheduled hearing. To accept an offer, a food service establishment must acknowledge that the violations alleged in the Notice of Violation existed at the time of

the inspection. However, the penalties offered by the agency to settle are generally lower than the penalties it recommends be imposed for the same violations if they are sustained at a hearing. In the future, the DOHMH plans to offer food service establishments the opportunity to settle by mail or online prior to their scheduled hearing dates.

For more information please visit our website at www.nyc.gov/health.

COOLING FOODS PROPERLY

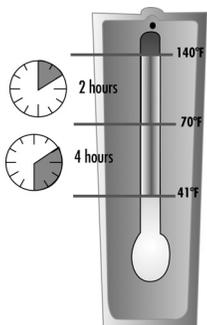
According to the Centers for Disease Control, improper cooling of food is one of the major causes of food-borne illness. During improper cooling, food is exposed to the **danger zone, 41°F to 140°F**, for much too long. This dangerous practice allows disease-causing bacteria such as *Clostridium perfringens* to multiply rapidly. This bacterium produces a toxin that causes diarrhea, fever and abdominal cramps. Symptoms of the disease may appear 8 to 20 hours after eating such food. The CDC estimates that as many as 250,000 individuals are affected by *C. perfringens* each year. Remember, such improperly cooled foods will still taste good despite being overwhelmed with dangerous disease-causing bacteria.

This risk is very high in deep pots of soup or chili, sauces, gravies, stews, rice, chili, whole turkeys and large cuts of meat. These large volumes of food are difficult to cool down quickly. Further, these foods will be served to many individuals and therefore have the potential to cause great harm.

The NYC Health Code requires that all potentially hazardous foods prepared for later service, including leftovers, be cooled rapidly. This means that in the

first two hours of cooling, the foods must be cooled from 140° F to 70° F or less, and then go from 70° F to 41° F within an additional four hours.

In order to cool foods safely, and minimize the risk to customers, food temperatures must be taken and documented on a cooling chart, entering one temperature reading each hour.



Cooling tracking sheet	
Hour	Temperature
start	140
1	
2	70
3	
4	
5	
6	41

Supervisors should write, test and implement a Standard Operating Procedure (SOP) for cooling each food item on the menu. It should include cooling in the recipe and the corrective action of improperly cooled food. The food temperatures must be taken and documented on a cooling chart, entering at least one temperature reading each hour.

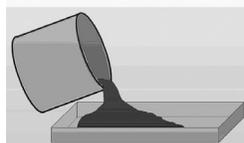
Improper cooling is common because food workers vastly underestimate actual cooling times. A typical 5-gallon uncovered container of stew cooling in a 41° F refrigerator will take over 30 hours to cool down. Simply, refrigerators are not designed to rapidly cool down food. However, it is likely the most common tool used to cool foods down.

What techniques are available to ensure rapid cooling and aid employee compliance with the SOPs that are established to ensure proper cooling?

The following recommendations are offered to help operators cool food quickly. The use of these methods does not guarantee proper cooling will occur; they must be used along with careful monitoring of time and temperature.

Increase surface area/ Decrease size.

One of the most important factors in cooling food is the mass and surface area of the food. Liquid foods should be placed in shallow containers at a depth of no more than 1 to 2 inches. Solid foods such as large cuts of meats and poultry should be cut into portions no bigger than 3 to 4 lbs, and arranged to expose surface area. These foods should be immediately placed in a refrigerator or ice bath to begin rapid cooling. Increasing the surface area of the food will shorten the cooling time.



Increase air flow

A Blast chiller is designed to quickly and safely cool foods rapidly and is the

best option. For refrigerator cooling, only place modest amounts of cooling food in a refrigerator at one time. During cooling, foods should be uncovered, with adequate distance from other foods. Replace the cover after the food has reached 41° F. Do not stack pans on top of one another. Stacking prevents the air from flowing around the pans so that heat can be removed quickly from the food product. Minimize the frequency of door opening.

Materials

Foods will cool more quickly in thin walled metal food containers because metal is an excellent conductor of heat. Glass, wood and plastic are generally insulators and should not be used.

Ice

An ice bath will cool foods much more quickly than a refrigerator. Place hot foods in an ice bath in a container or sink and stir occasionally. Replace ice as needed.



Clean ice may be poured directly into food for rapid cooling. Ice paddles and ice wands are also very effective. *Do not transfer foods directly from cooking equipment to the refrigerator, as this will raise the temperature of the unit and the other foods stored in it.*

Planning

Avoid preparing foods a day in advance of service to avoid cooling and reheating operations. Before preparing foods such as tuna salad, potato salad, egg salad or chicken salad, the ingredients for these dishes should be pre-chilled to 41° F before final assembly, in this way the rapid cooling requirement will be avoided.

Take note of off-peak days and adjust menu items and quantity to suit demand, to avoid leftovers.

SCOMBROID POISONING

Scombroid Poisoning is an allergic like reaction to high levels of histamine in fish. This occurs when certain fish start to decompose. This allows **histidine**, a naturally occurring protein (amino acid) in the fish, to convert into histamine by certain bacteria. The presence of high levels of **histamine** in the fish is an indication of the decomposition of the fish, even if it is not obvious through bad smell or taste. In the past five years, 75 cases of scromboid poisoning have been reported to the NYC Poison Control Center. The actual number of cases that occur from fish consumption is likely far greater than this.

Symptoms

The most commonly reported symptoms of Scombroid Poisoning include rash, flushed

skin, facial swelling, nausea, vomiting, diarrhea, headache, dizziness, a peppery taste in the mouth, burning throat, stomach pain, itchy skin, tingling and palpitations.

Symptoms can occur immediately to several hours after consumption of food with high levels of histamine. They typically last for a few hours, but in certain cases can last for several days, and may require administration of antihistamines.

Source

◆ The most common source of Scombroid Poisoning is fish of the *Scombridae* and *Scorberesocidae* families, known as “scombroid fish”, which includes tuna, bonito and mackerel. These fish have large amounts of free histidine that may be converted to histamine during improper cold storage.

◆ Scombroid Poisoning can also be caused by marlin and fish of other fami-

lies, such as Clupeidae (herring, sardines), and Coryphaenidae (mahi-mahi).

What can I do to protect my customers?

◆ Histamine formation in fish depends on the temperature at which the fish is kept from the time it is caught until it is consumed. Therefore, in order to avoid scombroid poisoning, it is very important to transport and store fish under refrigeration.

◆ Cooking or other heat treatments (such as canning or smoking) do not destroy histamine.

◆ Always purchase fish products from reputable seafood distributors.

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HAZARD ANALYSIS

Every Food Service Establishment (FSE) in New York City is legally bound to ensure that all food for human consumption is handled in a safe manner to ensure food safety. There are several ways to do that, however, the most efficient way is to carefully consider each step in the production of the food, and decide whether there is a potential for the food to be made unsafe by any physical, chemical and/or biological hazards. If so, control measures must then be put in place to remove or reduce that hazard. This process is called hazard analysis, and is not difficult to carry out. Below is a quick summary of this process:

Identify the hazards

◆ *Physical* – such as the presence of glass, metal, plastic or other matter in the food that can cause injury or illness

◆ *Chemical* – such as accidental inclusion

of cleaning materials or other harmful chemicals in the food

◆ *Biological* – the presence of bacteria, viruses, parasites and fungi in the food that cause food borne illness

Identify the various stages of food flow where the hazard exists and control measures to eliminate or reduce them.

- Receiving – Always use reputable suppliers, check all food items upon receipt.
- Storage – Implement First In First Out (FIFO) to ensure stock rotation, store at safe temperatures (41°F or below (except smoked fish at 38°F), avoid cross contamination by separating raw and cooked foods.
- Preparation – Always use clean and sanitary equipment and utensils (preferably color-coded equipment), ensure good personal hygiene, and always prepare foods in small batches.

- Cooking – Always cook foods to a safe temperature (poultry, stuffed meats, meat stuffings – 165°F, ground meats 158°F, pork 155°F, and all other foods such as eggs, fish, lamb etc. at 145°F).
- Cooling – Always cool foods quickly to a safe temperature (reduce temperature from 140°F to 70°F within two hours and from 70°F to 41°F within four additional hours or less).
- Reheating – reheat foods to a minimum temperature of 165°F within two hours.

Monitor to ensure that control measures are working.

- Receiving – Check temperatures, source, appearance, etc.
- Storage – Check temperatures, ensure stock rotation is taking place.
- Preparation - Clean equipment, etc.
- Cooking – Take final cooking temperatures.
- Cooling – Monitor cooling temperature, times and techniques, temperature logs.
- Reheating – Check temperature and time.

IS IT DONE YET?



Have you ever met a chef with a built-in thermometer on their fingers? Probably not, however a lot of them still use their fingers to check if the food is cooked to the right temperature. Additionally, chefs often use their past experience, judgment and the color of the food to determine if the foods are cooked. This method may not result in safe foods being served to your customers. For example, many people believe that ground beef is safe to eat when it turns brown during the cooking process.

A study conducted in 1995 by the Kansas State University showed that ground beef may turn brown long before it reaches a temperature of 158°F which is a minimum temperature to destroy pathogenic bacteria like *E. coli O157:H7*.

Food Safety and Inspection Service (FSIS) commissioned the USDA's Agricultural Research Service (ARS) to examine the doneness of ground beef by color.

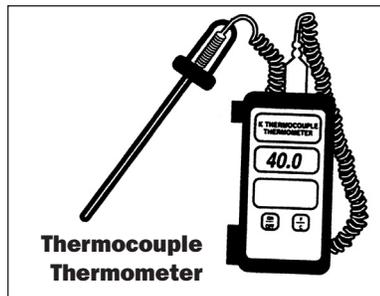
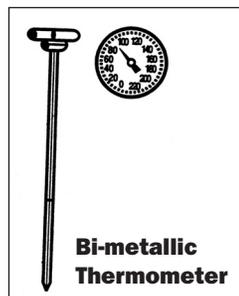
Their findings confirmed Kansas State University study and showed that one out of four ground beef burgers turned brown before reaching the safe temperature of 158 °F.

Furthermore, according to a 2002 consumer food safety survey conducted by the U.S. Food and drug Administration and FSIS, it was found that only 6 percent of cooks checked hamburgers with a food thermometer.

What Does This All Mean To You?

The only way to know food has been cooked to a safe internal temperature is to use a food thermometer. There are three acceptable food thermometers for use in a retail food service establishment: bi-metallic stem, thermocouple and thermistor (often called digital instant-read thermometer). It is important that all food workers learn the proper way of using thermometers to ensure food safety.

The use of glass-stemmed thermometers is prohibited by law as they can break and can cause contamination of the food.



DISCRIMINATION

The New York City Human Rights Law prohibits discrimination in hiring and firing as well as the terms and conditions of employment, i.e. assignments, salary, benefits, promotions, performance evaluations and disciplinary actions, based upon a person's actual or perceived age; race; creed; color; national origin; gender; disability; marital status; partnership status; sexual orientation; alienage or citizenship status; status as a victim of domestic violence, stalking or sex offenses; or arrest or conviction record.

The law also prohibits an employer from making statements, asking questions during interviews, and circulating job announcements or advertisements that suggest a preference for or prejudice against hiring individuals based on the groups listed above.

The New York City Commission on Human Rights enforces the Human Rights Law. Violations could result in fines of up to \$250,000.

If you have questions or comments regarding this newsletter, please call the Health Academy. Important telephone numbers are listed below.

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